THE POETRY REVIEW

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REASSESSMENT—II

. . . not just a single child, but the fathers, resting like mountain-ruins within our depths; but the dry river-bed of former mothers . . .
—Rilke (tr. Leishman and Spender).

In the last number of this journal we considered the necessity for a re-evaluation of literary criticism. As an extention of this proposition it might be appropriate to examine how the values and criteria of the poet himself relate to his work. It is generally accepted that the authentic poet is an unconscious self-critic, if he is not consciously so. That is to say, much of his potential output is discarded by him before it is even formulated in his mind; the more completely he is a poet the easier it is for him to discriminate between what is significant and what is not. From time to time someone asserts that the poet is a poet and need not possess any critical attributes. Indeed, as Lascelles Abercrombie reminds us in one of his essays on literary criticism, Socrates made capital of the fact that on questioning a group of poets as to the meaning of their work, they were unable to answer him.

Although the poet is not necessarily a critic in the general sense (it must be remembered that some of the greatest poets have reached both the summit and the abyss of literary criticism) it seems obvious, from all available evidence, that he must possess an advanced degree of self-criticism; whilst the lesser poet may produce several indifferent pieces of verse for every true poem, the really good poet may write fewer poems but of a greater average distinction. It is therefore the relationship between the critical and the creative faculty of the poet which must be reassessed before a proper understanding of contemporary poetry can be arrived at in relativity to all the poetry that has been written in the past.

To-day the poet has a deeper technical knowledge of himself than ever before. The word "technical" is used deliberately because of course the artist has always possessed a deeper insight into his own psyche than the rest of mankind; the dæmons and angels of his moods of unrest and elation, the intricacies of his personality, have always been the very stuff and media from which his particular art has developed. Blake claimed that he wrote from the dictation of divine voices; Plato's view also was that the poet was divinely inspired. In a sense both were right but the poet to-day has an extra and particularised awareness of the source and nature of these intimations; psychological discoveries have been made available to the reading public, and the poet, if he is sincere, cannot and must not ignore them. It is no longer possible for him to write without some awareness of the psychical and physical processes which turn his experience into a poem. With a knowledge of the workings of his unconscious mind he is the more conscious of discoveries still to be made

and in the disclosure of which he has a part to play. So that to a very large extent the critic in the poet functions more prominently than hitherto. There are, of course, a few notable exceptions among poets to-day, as there are in every age, and these are poets whose work does not reflect any contemporaneous aspect of existence, such as, for instance, Walter de la Mare and Andrew Young.

In poetry the poet's experience is expressed by the verbal presentation of visual images familiar and recognisable to the reader. This is not intended to be taken as a definition of poetry but merely as one aspect of the means by which it is communicated. In general, poetic images have in the past taken the form of appropriate external objects, from Chaucer's

Whit was his berd as is the dayesye

to Yeats'

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!

Psychologists have shown how the world of dream and fantasy bears a direct relationship to art; archetypal images, planetary shapes and all the experiences to which mankind is subject are inherent in the unconscious mind of the human race, and the poet, having by his very nature especial access to the rich race memory, may now identify his experience, not only with external symbols but with the infinitely more significant and accurate imagery of the psyche. Interesting in this respect is the poetry of Blake, who, without the stimulus of scientific discovery made spontaneous and direct contact with his inner mind. Completely orientated from his age his work is becoming more intelligible than ever before. The weird Zoas, the grotesque Emanations, the Wild Beast and the Spectre—all the released prototypes of the imagination fall into place with surprising logic in the light of modern knowledge.

To say that the critic in the modern poet is more active than in the past is not, of course, to say that the poet of to-day deliberately selects his imagery. We are anxious to point out that the poet, in his deeper self-knowledge, is now able to perceive latent images and symbols of his mind and to use fully his selective powers, sharpened by the presentation of immediate associations between the idea to be expressed and the image evoked. Some of Dylan Thomas's poems give clear examples of this type of association:

No
Praise that the spring time is all
Gabriel and radiant shrubbery as the morning grows joyful

and

On almost the incendiary eve
Of deaths and entrances,
When near and strange wounded on London's waves
Have sought your single grave,

One enemy, of many, who knows well
Your heart is luminous
In the watched dark, quivering through locks and caves,
Will pull the thunderbolts
To shut the sun, plunge, mount your darkened keys
And sear just riders back,
Until that one loved least
Looms the last Samson of your zodiac.

As for the poet, so for the reader; the fuller interpretation of unconscious into conscious thought is becoming more widely apprehended. It is only through an understanding of what the poet is about, and his constant effort to express artistic experience within the limits of language that the reader can arrive at a satisfactory assessment of modern poetry.

MURIEL SPARK.

CONVERSATION PIECE

MICHAEL REDGROVE

So when the meal was done and the tranquil room
gathered obscurity as bright day waned
(O the sands run down, run down and nothing done—
nothing, and everything!) while colour drained
from room, fields, trees and sky, the womb
of wide night quickened, and a star was born
that swam above the darkening trees, forlorn.
Smoking, we savoured silence: then talked of Style,
choosing like lustred grapes each classic name—
Pater and Beerbohm, Newman. And all the while
the star was solitary, a tiny flame . . .
O then the memory came
and, like the death of colour and the day,
as these dissolved so waned serenity
while talk trailed into silence, and the grey
bleak shore I wandered of an empty sea.

POEM FOR ONE LOVED

J. R. TOWNSEND

To this high summer of our bodies' love
Are drawn the passed spring, the implicit harvest
And all beginnings and ends, the richness of seasons
Gathered to one brief field, warmed by a sun
Soon to be lost but royal.

And turning away is hard; yet the world is waiting
Always at the edge of our shadow, for no one is far
From love, and the nearest of all are the ever unlucky
Lost in a grief deeper than hate or hunger
Winter—and war bereaved

Who walk with the waters of longing locked in their eyes
Ice in their wintering blood and a hate in the peace
Of limbs lying cold and lonely as fallen candles:
Men who are not, and the girls whose love as lifeblood
Pours to the emptying years.

And we being innocent know we are also guilty
And dare not speak with those whose knowledge is deep
In the ways we have not yet known from the known flesh,
In spheres which are strange to the sphere where our joy is blazing,
Around us within us raising our day, our night.

THE HERM

KATHLEEN RAINE

Blind I know with senses rising from fern and tree,
Blind lips and fingers trace a god no eyes can see,
Blind I touch love's monster form that bounds
My world of field and forest, crowns my hills.
Blind I worship a blind god in his hour
Whose serpent-wand over my soul has power
To lead the crowding souls back from the borders of death,
Heaven's swift-winged fiat, earth's primeval monolith.

SPRING (THE FOURTH ODE OF HORACE)

K. W. GRANSDEN

1

Broken is winter's edge, in the lovely change of Spring and the west wind,
And the ships are wound in dry to anchor.
Not now are the cattle content in the barn, nor the farmer by his fireside,
Not now the white frosts hide the meadow.

2

Venus translated from Cyprus leads her chorus under the hanging moon:
Perfect the nymphs and graces mingle
And dance abroad together: and the fierce fire of Vulcan visits
The Cyclops in his power house.

3

Now is the hour: let us crown fair hair with the green bay-garland,
Or any flower the free earth offers.
Now is the hour: let us sacrifice in the shady groves to the god Pan
A lamb, a goat: his choice, his honour.

4

But they'll hear the march of Death when he comes to call at the tenement—
At the gates of the palace they'll hear it;
Don't be deceived into false hope, friend—not from your tiny life's span:
Already the night and the priests' hell is upon you.

5

The world of the homeless is waiting: and one day, when you get home there,
You won't have to cut the cards to buy the drinks;
Young Lycidas won't distract you then, though all the boys are in love with him,
And the girls fall for him later.

THE FOUR BROTHERS

ANTONY BORROW

One brother chimed a rope of golden bells
And laid his naked heart within a rose,
To find a palsied strumpet's penny smile
Arrassed behind the portrait of a queen.

Another found the treasure on the hill,
Forged him a sabre and carved out a crown.
A star fell shattered; and a beggar's dam
Spawned in a ditch the orphan of a dream.

The third one gambled with his father's shade
For that dread sentence that will freeze men's hands;
But winter kept his finger in the scales
Against the quick. The dead possessed the land.

The youngest, feckless as a summer's air
Laughed in the sun too long, and lived to see
The wolf howl from the blackness of the pines
And snow betray his passage from the gate.

LEGENDS OF THE CROSS

MARGARET STANLEY-WRENCH

Consòle the peacock, you who know the answers,
Silence his anguished voice, essence of pain
That knows his God is dead. Revive the fritilliary,
Flower of death, chequered with its blood,
Bruised by His pain, livid and maculate.
Make still the aspen, that, with restless leaves
Flashes white facets, brittle and agonised
In token of the day of shame and death,
When, dragged from the forest, from the glade of spring
Trembling with fragile shadows, dappled with violets,
They stripped the branches, flayed the wrinkled bark,
Planed, and made the living tree a Cross.

THE HOSTS OF THE HORIZON

HERBERT CORBY

Always, just out of sight, like a glass steeple
birdlike with bells or laughter, someone beckoned:
always the sand was hissing like mad geese:
horizon hills behind him fell like ice.
Always, the voice that never called him twice,
but mentioned, in oblique disaster, those
cardinal sins whose imprint stared before him;
always the backs of the receding people.

He could not see the lily nor the fountain,
only the yellow desert, the anserine sand:
the Judas distance that was cloud or mountain:
nor could believe the water on his hand,
but stumbled past the oasis to the crater,
where the hosts of the horizon, laughing, waited.

SONNET

HILARY CORKE

All in a strayed unhappy hour alone
I pace the orchard, mateless in the free
And coupling spring whose soft birds in the throne
And lap of love tumble so flutteringly—
O luck to all such seed so lightly sown!
But I am luckless and more like to cry
Against this fruit-tree's rind, if it would move
The angel of the tree to raise me Eve
All young and fresh and fallen from the sky,—
The slim tree that reminds me of my own
Sweet lover, and with fruits denied to me
No hand shall pluck, by no winds to be blown.
This cherry tree reminds me of my love:
And I will pluck her cherries by and by.

STATUES IN A GARDEN

URSULA STUART LAIRD

The year unfolds, the earth is flecked with green,
sunlight and stars drown in a daffodil,
moonlight and rain swoon across limpid skies
kissing the corn's young lips in the cold blue night.

So full the earth, it bursts in laughing clouds
of fruit and wheat and sleepy searching bees,
it bursts in clouds of clover mauve and hot
and sunsets heavy with a crimson dust.

And now a sulky greyness stills the world
yet you O silent statues have not changed,
I pity you your immobility,
knowing no birth, no harvest, and no death.

POEM

R. L. COOK

Only the walled-in dead can know
How quietly sleeps the worm-kissed bone;
Only the hollow skull can rest
  Empty of thought, alone.

And they are married with the earth,
Divorced from hungry flesh they lie:
Only the skeleton can tell
  How sweet it is to die.

The coffin moulders into clay,
The useless plaque dissolves in rust:
But bones remain, slowly to find
  Fulfilment in the dust.

ANNIVERSARY

K. W. GRANSDEN

Far from my heart for ever
At the year's uneasy turning,
By what strange embankments
Do you walk, and whistle
A phrase we both remember
From another autumn?

When the late leaves of Wiltshire
Fell sadly from the lime-trees,
My hand removed reluctant
From yours, compelled by
Reasons we both remember
From another autumn.

Light of the years I left you
Because of error's choosing,
Your head is in my eye still,
My ear rehearses
The logic you remembered
In another autumn.

No more nights quick with purpose
Can call me deep in laughter
Towards the new-adventured
Country of kindness
Whose breath I still remember
From another autumn.

Companionship corroded
By spite and information
Coloured our times together:
Safely you smile at
Love's ache, but I remember
That other autumn.

Wrongly you would remember
Whatever you remember,
For I am not the friend who
Turned you from him
That day we both remember
In another autumn.

Five years to fly from boyhood
Should be enough, but after
The coward earth is colder,
The fun has vanished:
No hell for you remembers
That other autumn.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

PHILIP JOHN STEAD

There is a fog tonight that turns the lamps
To saintless haloes. The pavement glistens black.
Vaguely, with blinded yellow eyes, the cabs
Creep by the kerb. Alone here I have thought
All through the twilight, Master of the Pains,
Of your implacable and burning shade
That ranges cities on their winter nights.

I have more memories, you said, than if
A thousand years were mine. So have all lonely men,
Who go by shuttered warmth and others' loves
And exercise the heart's seigneurial right
To long for beauty as it shows itself
Either a silken girl who is too gay
Or as the wisest and most fair of angels,
Hearing the tale that set the scaffold up.

There is a fog tonight. The city yearns
Back to its Middle Age. And your dark face,
Seamed with the shade, has passed among us here,
Finding the knot still tied, the wings lashed back,
The million's sorrows in the single heart.
And in the Roman hour that sighs "forget"
Is still damnation, Master. We have learned
Nothing.

Is it the foggy street, the ochre lamp
Or I that conjure you? Or does the pain
That racks a city's heart compel you here,
To contemplate, as some sick doctor might,
An agony you know but cannot cure?

WHITE CYCLAMENS

J. T. BROCKWAY

Winged victories! poised on the ravished air
In spectral flight,
Your five white pinions furled:
You bare your amber secrets to the world
Of light,
And dare the absent bee,
The drowsy wraiths of summer murmurings,
To fold their ghostly wings,
Alight,
And probe your immobility.

Red at the root, through pallor lengthening,
Like mottled water, to transparency,
Your sappy stems, contort like tentacles
Of some convulsive underwater thing,
That gropes the air, explores, recoils,
Whilst through their marbled writhing peer
Close-curled, spear-pointed eyes,
The whorlèd buds of pale futurity,
Of future flights, of further victories.

Locked in the winter prison of my room,
No ghost of dragonfly, or bee, will come
To fructify the promise in the womb:
Your faultless wings shall fall, your progeny
Drop stillborn, laid to rest on barrenness:
Your doom it is to wrest
The spellbound minute from the hand of Time,
The ravished Now, the moment's ecstasy.

Here, as for him, who wedded to a rhyme,
Pale fool, who'd stretch weak words to match your fame,
Lies all your purpose, all your progeny:
Lies, too,
(White wings that put his withered flowers to shame!)
Lies your victorious immortality.

ADVENT

JAMES KIRKUP

O let all the morning stars
shine out again into this coming day
let every winter tree be proud
with beating leaves and singing clouds of wings,
and let the night that was around
my head and in my frightened heart
withdraw now, give adoring place
to wonder, and this miracle of light.

For he has come, the radiant delight
of the forsaken and the blind; deliverer,
loud angel bringing me the sight
of grace within his treasured silences
and comfort in the speaking of his name
O, let the world be glad again
with real innocence: for his bright hands release
the bitterness of triumphs with the true vanquishing of peace.

DECAY BY DAILY STAGES

JOHN ATKINS

Who was born on the quiet Thursday night
while the fagging week slacks its dreaming breath
is countersigned by strong emphatic sons
of Monday's loins. The inference is slight
but welcome now, the quickly moving death,
enveloping with fire from surly guns
the fragile lungs of mercy, stabbed with spite,
efficient warriors turned to gibbering nuns,
clutching their skirts, nibbling their precious buns.

THE ROSE ABOVE THE THORN

PHOEBE HESKETH

Not healed or sleeping: by our wounds we live—
Torn from the whole the nerve is sensitive.
Yet each frustrated thread lives through its raw
Self-suffering, and obedient to the law
Of integration seeks the source again,
And breaks in blossom from the branch of pain.

And so through pain of sorrow we give more
Completely, know that we entire before
Were flesh without the anguish appearing through—
From a wounded side the rose of purpose grew.

We, halved and starving, striving each to each,
Yet liberated, doubled, fed, can teach
The joy inherent in the heart of pain,
The loss transcended in a mutual gain,
And know how wingless eagles learn to soar,
That a silent street is singing when one door
Rings with a blade of light down steps of stone.

And so the hurt soul limps back to its own
Inheritance, renewed through scars, to make
A red rose hide the thorn for loving's sake.

ALBA

For Stephen Spender

PETER RUSSELL

Eyes like gazelles may wander, spenders
Of hours on horizons, days on a spendthrift hope;
Mild innocencies should not mar the sender
Of the seasons' rain or dusty heliotrope.

The mole digs, the eagle flies, fish
In their watery element can fill the world with spawn;
Shall we for the world's disdainment spurn a wish
Or spell with guilt all-too-precipitous dawn?

STILL SHINE THE STARS

(From The German of Dagmar Nick)

ERIC PETERS

Still shine the stars on ruins long-forsaken,
The moon still peers through gape of window-pane,
While in the chimneys stormwinds still awaken
Their old refrain.

Speak no more of the dead, beyond world's trouble
Buried. One sole inscription must abide
In dusty ciphers on their tombs of rubble:
Unidentified.

Dreams hover yet above the roofs which battle
Brought down in shards upon the dreamer's head,
Where now the broken rafters nightlong rattle,
Wind-buffeted.

Look heavenward, not at the ling facades
Of houses war has spared but time outgrown,
The stars are bright above the still cascades
Of lifeless stone.

LATE AUTUMN

M. WINTER WERE

The spirit called to the wind
From the warm west,
'Lull me with golden leaves
Blown from the crest.

Of gold-wrought coronet
On lonely hills:
Fold the wild wilderness
The storm-day fills,

Deep in the shawls of Night,
And let me be
Quilted in Quietude
And Courtesy.'

THE LION

LEONARD CLARK

He comes suddenly into the peopled places,
A lion out of Judah,
With terrible visage and breath,
A voice like waterfalls.

He pierces with dread eye the rocky places
And dark vegetation,
He advances when scenting his prey
To the world's edge and beyond it.

He roars hungrily in the broken places,
That lion out of Judah,
Choosing white lambs on the hills,
Not to ravish but to woo them.

ANGEL BY FIRE

MORWENNA DONELLY

Sit on the step where sunlight chances on the garden
And trees flash like swords beneath the wind, for these
Speak absolution to the proud imprisoned mind: O dark
Troubled and implacable mind, they stand translucent
To the light, leaves which give tongue to the strong wind.
The seed's dower, the reed which leans in the still water;
Their joy and meekness have no vigil or armour.

Man knows this hallowing in regress, straits, in death
To take his baptism again: long ritual hours of fire
Set their clear seal of immolation in his veins
To bear the light: burned then to clarity by grief
He bursts his firmament and through the fiery space
Sees in the holocaust the angel's face.

ELEGY

NICHOLAS MOORE

Death has come to the one with eyes of
Thunder, deep blue, dark as a river;
Let us forever remember the soldier,
Lying here in his last resistance.

Move, move over; turn to another
Song or sorrow; remember tomorrow
The sun will shine and the breeze be tender,
Blowing the yellow girl's flowing hair.

In her eyes she will bear a burden,
Light blue eyes in the yellow sunshine;
She will watch for the coot and the dipper,
The little lizard under the stone.

And her long hand will hold a child's hand,
A smiling child, who picks the small daisies;
Slowly the river will twist and the tender
Breezes blow. Yet she will not remember.

Let us erect a permanent rhythm,
Tall and strong as the sway of the grasses,
To commemorate this eternal comrade,
Lying lost in resistless shade.

IMAGES

KEITH FOOTTIT

We watered the dead roses of our youth,
And found them ashes,
Black with their own loveliness.
Lighten our darkness, O Lord, with the hope of Spring.
We looked into your eyes
And found them sweeter than the song of the blackbird
In the dawn.
From dust we come, to dust return.

FOG ON THE RIVER

RICHARD A. GOFTON

These are not ships that pass: they are men's dreams
Lost in the archipelagos of mind,
Lost and forgotten thoughts that voyage still
Seeking for harbours they will never find,
For every year but further dims the beams
Cast by the stubborn lighthouse of the will;
Thoughts that were once great-masted, splendid ships
Launched in the noontide of the mind's desires,
Now nosing up strange rivers; forlorn trips
Of purpose lost, frustrated plans, their fires
Brief as these fires that on the water dance
Where here the sun hurls through his toy grenades
That flash upon the water, flash and die:
Only the sun's cheap aureole marks the sky,
The fog has drawn all else with cunning chance
Thoughts, O my thoughts! cease voyaging and keep
Our ancient rendezvous: come let us start
Back down time's lonely tunnels where we heap
The skeleton-memories which haunt our sleep
And our awaking. Lay their bones apart:
Find me one moment that once urged my heart,
One moment of high venture when I stood
Above the world, with hands outstretched to grasp
Life's prize. But stood. But watched time pass. And now
The past clings like this fog around my brow,
While strange ships move—these ghostly thoughts that clasp
The lost, forbidden truths on which men brood.

NIGHTFALL

KENNETH GEE

Nightfall, leaf-fall: coming home, now.
It is time gentlemen, please, to go your ways.
There where the road leads down to sleep,
Will you not go, among bird-haunted groves

Where song is dying with the day,
Over the quiet acres of the park,
Downstreet where trees are now no more than clouds
In dusk? red is fading from their leaves.

You are dreaming already. Sleep.
The lamps nod, in time with your slow step.
The lazy river calls you home,
An echo of mourning, by tree, by stone.

The room is empty, the floor is swept.
Glass is drained and door is shut.
The torch burns down. Downstreet the voices pass,
Last tinkle of laughter falls, is lost.

LOVE'S GARMENT

FREDERIC VANSON

Remains the narrow bed and the brief season
between desire and midnight;
remains the kiss and the lying-together;
turning the stair
we gather love about us as a garment.

So shall we cancel all our little deaths—
love like the tree-caught moon influence kindly
the hearts' conjunctions while the speaking hands
prove wonder with us.

Love's eyes in sensual ecstasy reject
disaster's day's end, wisps of fool events:
remain the simple words-to-lovers poems.

Remains the innocent head, though frost
harden the reeling earth, the crystal air—
come let us gather
tightly love's garment and ascend the stair.

HARVEST

HARDIMAN SCOTT

Come out of the sun, I who still am young
Have seen this harvest sharpened from the green
Ground on the rapier tongues of rain, seen
The day creep on slow wind's feet through the fields,
Uncovering in the innocent wheat
The bronzed blush that yields to the aged conceit
Of the philandering sun, and watch now
The cutting down of the full-hearted youths
Of corn that, growing, would allow what truths
To perish or rejoice. The sun has made
It thus that brings me to harvest, and makes
Glad the land to fade its joy for the sake
Of birth, and they would have been shallow things
That lived beyond this sun-high altar.
Each day brings this everlasting psalter
Of the season new songs of the reaper
And binder gathering up these golden
Consummated hours that, bound, embolden
Death to come join the singing revelry.
O, mark this time when mighty living holds
The confraternity that must enfold
All birth and dying, and in the gleanings
Of the grain write a saviour's living words.

But yet have I seen another harvest
Sharpened, out of the dark ground and the dark
Souls unblest of the earth and the lark's
High song, by the fire-hungry tongues of hate;
Seen, who have turned from the sun and the eyes
Of night and the fate of seasons, the wise
Among them stoop to weep; have even seen
The cutting down of the full-hearted youths
Who, in the green of years, bartered their truths
For courage and an angry brotherhood.
The young and the old came to share their pain
Of silent widowhood, suffered the slain
In suddenly ravaged hearts, for the heart
Alone remained still happy to the blood
And the old rhythms that start in the bud
But forgotten had lain in drooping flowers,
And learnt their despair in the ways of war,

O so great a sorrow that has been law
In these imprisoned hearts must break open
The unfallowed ground for the healing rains
In growth of death to restore the lost gains
Of those so cruelly harvested, and wait
The rising sun again. O, may they now
Be not late where the coulters of the plough
Unfold the earth, but be wed to the corn
Falling, and in the gleanings of the grain
Write a saviour's living words.

THE SWAN RISING

ERNEST M. FROST

That dazzled swan, so long sought in the brain,
had suffered in the pollen and the haze
of this slow-beating spring a stretch of wings
splayed like the archangel; and now it blazes all
I see, and stamps upon my mind, looping away.

I'd called it princely names so often that
it could not choose but blind the common name
of things we own, for as it swerved over the larches
of my thought's most tenuous, most naked grove
something had moved there like another sun.

I could be glad of this, while never quite
touching the errant feathers of the thing;
only the shape had thrown the world askew,
bringing the dreamer nearer to the dream,
lending some harsh remedial whiteness to the time.

And while it soared the metalled river lay
accustomed and indifferent. Hot midday
drank the dull shine; boats dragged the tide
like words which tried to follow it. There played
sweet mocking gramophones to foil its way.

Yet this, too, stays with it and seems
its necessary voice. The boats, the flags, the clay
and stumbling common songs—these were its rightful
tongues, a many-peopled heart glowing among
that image of the mind, that crossbow of white dreams.

The Age of Anxiety, by W. H. Auden (Random House, U.S.A.); *Poems 1937-42*, by David Gascoyne (Poetry, London, 8s. 6d.); *A Little Treasure of Modern Verse*, ed. Oscar Williams (Routledge, 10s. 6d.); *In The Tower's Shadow*, by N. K. Cruikshank (O.U.P., 6s.); *The Lightning-struck Tower*, by Sheila Shannon (Muller, 7s. 6d.); *Music for Statues*, by Derek Stanford (Routledge, 5s.); *Listen Confides the Wind*, by Roland Gant (Fortune, 7s. 6d.); *Ins/Outs*, by Hyman Swetzoff (Bern Porter, U.S.A.); *Holes in the Sky*, by Louis MacNeice (Faber, 7s. 6d.).

REVIEWED BY

ALEX COMFORT

I

Auden's long silences, as well as the fact that he remains the most important single influence in the forming of an entire generation's poetic idiom, focus a great deal of attention on his books. His works today are clearly the results of considered rather than spasmodic literary activity, and they are being produced in the period of the author's life when it is reasonable to expect his major pronouncements. I say this because, in view of all these considerations, and in view of the quality of the last book to reach us, *The Age of Anxiety* is a profound shock. When we compare it with the previous succession of Auden's work it strongly resembles the handwriting of a patient recovering from a major operation— its connection with what has gone before has become parodic.

I find it difficult to understand the reason for this effect, which I do not think to be a personal defect in myself as reader—I have followed and admired the general development of Auden's writing, and the skeleton of it remains here: in fact, the semi-dramatic form is a reversion to the form of *The Orators*, but shorn of the lyrical and technical mastery and interspersed with prose narrations which resemble Henry James at his most self-conscious. The humour, too, which has never previously failed to mix with Auden's poetry, is replaced by a kind of callow smartness which is entirely alien to the humour of the early verse plays. The alliterative trick, similar to the alliterative structure of early English verse, has been present in Auden's lyrics from the outset, and in the past it has never become tiresome. I had felt that *The Age of Anxiety* might be intended for vocal, not paper, reading, and that it miscarried for lack of spoken intonation when seen as a printed page, but the overgrowth of this alliterative device to control the sound structure of whole passages, and the impression of deliberate, cold-blooded gag-writing and adjective-hunting which exists throughout the work make it inconceivable as a dramatic piece. The satire, too, which is a vital cohering-force in the conception, is written-in, without indignation, sympathy, or any real conviction. War, slums,

corpses, drunks, and the bitterness of epidemic and pandemic neurosis are treated exactly as the naturalistic excursions of the Georgians—as material for poeticism. It is very interesting to compare the interpretations of this epidemic anxiety in Auden and in Patchen's *Albion Moonlight*. The first does not even irritate, while the second terrifies. Yet Auden is an immeasurably better technician than Patchen. Something quite unpredictable has gone wrong in this book both with his sense of poetry and with his ability to comprehend his environment.

If I thought that the failure of this book, at a time when there was no possible reason to expect a failure, represented any fundamental crisis in Auden's writing I would keep off it, since adverse criticism in those circumstances probably assists neither the poet nor the public. It seems far more likely that it is in fact an experiment in the blending of a manner which is not Auden's with the past technical devices which he has used. There is a very real risk that at the point when a writer finds himself repeating himself, his conscious attempts to end the tendency will make him parody himself instead.

> "Sob, heavy world
> Sob as you spin
> Mantled in mist, remote from the happy
> The Washerwomen have wailed all night,
> The disconsolate clocks are crying together,
> And the bells toll and toll
> For tall Agrippa who touched the sky:
> . . . . . mourn for him now
> Our lost dad,
> Our colossal father."

The second probable factor is the wide difference between Auden writing spontaneously about unsound ideas which were his own, in his political period, and Auden writing from the mind, or from the library, about sound ideas which are other people's. Auden gives us no clue that he has observed at first hand the anxiety about which he writes (he is seeing it in a country which is not his own, and therefore with considerable difficulty, since it appears in social institutions in which he was not reared) or that the sociological and psychological ideas behind the satire, or even the religious ideas which appear intermittently, have any more significance for him than that of passive assent. He seems undecided whether to accept or to satirise them together with the social jungle itself. It is particularly interesting that passages from *The Age of Anxiety* appeared in the *New Yorker*, as it is the (indigenous) humorists who have taken the best literary measure of that jungle—Ogden Nash, for instance. The mixture of serious intention and farcical presentation seems to belong to American writing by birth, not by adoption. Work as different as *Sweeney Agonistes* (of which long passages of *The Age of Anxiety* are almost transcriptions) and *Memoirs*

of a Shy Pornographer achieves a positive synthesis of this kind. It seems to be a product of the double awareness of America as the metropolis of urban lunacy and as a largely unpopulated country. The native American writer either can or does withdraw in a manner which gives him a means of rearranging his standards—Auden, partly because of his seriousness of intention, and partly, I feel, because of the fear of failing to come across which every writer experiences, has no means, outside his reading, of assessing the anxiety: the only anxiety in this book is his own. It might have been written for a prize. The ominous thing in it is the suggestion that he is tending to develop a dislike of human beings as individuals, a process which leads to a corresponding inflation of a poet's self-esteem to a point at which it is incompatible with poetry. But in general I think that this is a work either of fatigue or of transition, and I do not think it will occupy any serious place in the final assessment of Auden himself. Lorca, attempting to interpret an identical subject, the *rage de New York*, produced a very similar poem.

II

David Gascoyne remains, I think, not only the most tragic of contemporary English writers, in the sense that Aristotle meant when he called Euripides the most tragic of the poets: he also happens to be the most easily approachable by way of tradition. It is surprising to find a writer who has graduated by way of experiments in surrealism, and by way of the European as well as the English tradition of verse, becoming, when we see his collected poetry in its sum, possibly the most directly accessible modern poet to readers who dislike and distrust much experimental writing. I stress this because Gascoyne's strength and his uniqueness, and his intensely poetic attitude to his material, are certain, so far as any appreciative judgment is certain, to make him a poet whose reputation will increase. He has always combined a striking awareness of tradition with his experimental work. His uniqueness in present-day English writing is due to the fact that he lives his poetry—it is a part of his personality, and the heaven and hell of the religious terms in which he interprets are parts of his own experience. The living of poetic experience, as opposed to its creation under control, produces a particular tone and atmosphere which is as recognisable in Gascoyne as in Hölderlin, whom he understands, I feel, better than any other writer today, in Rimbaud, in Francis Thompson; one of its characters, a character of the particular personality which creates in this way, is that wherever the tragedy of events, or the tragedy of man, is being treated, the poet's range of emotional experience is being projected and superimposed on it: his range of experience is outside the normal range of emotional perception. The success of poetry which is produced in this way depends upon the power of the writer to make generally realisable what he himself has experienced. I think it is Gascoyne's iron control over his material which makes his significance

as a writer so great—his detachment from what he writes is the result of a self-discipline outside the range of almost all the poets who are his contemporaries. The focus of this self-discipline is, in Gascoyne's case, religious, but I feel that its validity, both as poetry and as a personal achievement, is not dependent on our acceptance of Gascoyne's religious belief. Personally I am almost as much moved by his work as an agnostic, as I think I would be if I accepted Gascoyne's God. To this extent his God is Humanity, or a reflection of himself, at once his own adversary and his creative identity.

> Hand that I love! Lord Light,
> How dark is thy arm's will and iron-like
> Thy ruler's finger that has sent me here!
> Far from thy face I nothing understand
> But kiss the Hand that has consigned
>
> Me to these latter years where I must learn
> The revelation of despair, and find
> Among the debris of all certainties
> The hardest stone on which to found
> Altar and shelter for Eternity.

I remember the effect which this book of poems produced when it first came out, and I think it is enough to say that it has lost nothing between editions. Gascoyne's position in modern poetry would require a longer essay than I can give it here, but its claim to permanence is easier to make out, perhaps, than that of any other contemporary writer except Eliot.

III

I have had time to study "A Little Anthology"; I saw it in the American edition some time ago: therefore when I say that it is to my mind by far the best collection of modern verse which I have seen, I am not going on normal reviewers' comments. Plenty of us who read poetry know nothing about American writing, apart from its most obvious bridgeheads in English anthologies. Williams has covered both our literatures equally fully. It is impossible to miss the striking impression of richness and variety in performance which his book gives—this is probably the most sensitive test of an anthology, and it is a compliment to Williams as an editor.

The book covers writing in English from the beginning of the century to the present time, serious and humorous, and I know of no other anthology which approaches either its scope or its standard: the best which have appeared are limited by personal tastes, like Yeats' *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, to an extent which makes them dangerous unless one has time to go through collected works, the job one pays the anthologist to do. It manages to be both catholic and critical. Those who know modern verse well will find new material: those who do not, or who cannot see it as

continuous with what went before, can make their way from the traditional, such as Masefield, whose real stature appears very clearly and free of undergrowth in Williams' choice, through the entire range of experimental verse. If only this book could replace *Poems of Today* in schools!

One can criticise the selection in detail—Patchen and Rexroth are serious omissions among modern Americans, and Williams should not have included two-thirds as many of his own poems as of Yeats, but otherwise his taste is unerring. The preface is not as instructive as it looks, but prefaces to anthologies pass unread in any case. Lastly, for it is important, the size and presentation make the book capable of becoming what it should be, a constant travelling-companion. It is a long time since any anthology has merited such a review as I am giving this one, even if one includes Bottrall's and Aldington's collections, where the scope is different, but I have been waiting for the chance to give it the commendation it deserves. For members of the Poetry Society, and particularly for members who don't think they like modern writing, I regard it as indispensable. If they will not buy it, it should be given to them by force.

IV

The tower-image shared by Miss Cruikshank and Miss Shannon is a coincidence. For Miss Shannon it is the sixteenth Tarot card, for Miss Cruikshank, the Tower in Siloam, an image of the sudden publicity of death descending on ordinary, unprepared people. Miss Cruikshank though very unequal, is perhaps the best of the present list. She is varied, far more often let down by her ear than by her sensibility towards her subject, and her cohering idea of the Tower is worthwhile. She can be both clumsy and tiresome in her assonances and her juxtaposition of sounds, but some individual poems are impressive in a way which none of the other writers in this batch achieves.

> "O faces of war!
> Still in the mind's uncrowded space
> Growing, as actors do in a finale
> Who row on row give place,
> Keep on receding to make room for more
>
> You mass in me, you mass in me;
> You pass through me, yet mass in me, yet wait
> Waving your smiles of recognition,
> And known like sisters, populate
> Like settlers, the wide noun Humanity."

Only the defective sound of this (line 3, like=like in lines 9-10) keep it from excellence. It has the incisiveness of an idea which has been polished. Miss Cruikshank belongs to a category of feminine poetry (there is such a thing, just as there are differences between the approach and personality-

reactions of men and women) which is capable of penetrating observation and very high achievement. Miss Shannon is different, much under the influence of Turner, a very much better poet than critic; she is, like Turner, poetical at times, but at her best, in poems like "Plaga Mundi" she reminds me a little of Lynette Roberts. I rather feel that her observation has been diluted away by her borrowings from Yeats and from Turner, but the least formal and most original poems show that she has her own word to say.

Stanford is a critic of real seriousness, but I cannot bring myself to like his verse—I do not think it is his real medium. Possibly analytical insight into other people's work is not fully compatible with creation. I find his imagery so academic and so inflated that it obscures anything he originally saw—it is the exaggeration of a tendency in his critical essays towards Humpty Dumpty's Impenetrability. The loading-down with flowers, gold, and baroque objects fails precisely because it has no sort of counterpart in experience. It is possibly rather hard for a writer who has Stanford's intense concern with poetry to confine himself to writing *about* it, but the originality of what he writes by way of criticism, and the poverty of his verse, seem to be an argument for a voluntary discipline of this kind.

Gant's book I find extremely hard to criticise at all—it is exactly like so many other books of poetry—nowhere striking, nowhere bad, a slice of competent poetic sound. The appendix of short-stories is the same thing in prose, which sets me thinking.

I mention Swetzoff's book (the only American one) chiefly because of its very striking assimilation of European influences, particularly Eluard. It is instructive to compare a passage of Gant, who represents very well the middle-competent zone of writing here, with one from Swetzoff, a better-than-average American poet. The difference of idiom is striking, but it is Swetzoff who is closer to Europe:

> Railway lamps red and green
> have in their kerosene conception
> the reincarnation of an old song.
> Dew damp lawns, mossed terrace
> with the granite spheres,
> and secretive yews moulded
> by sinewed brown hands
> to the memory of the peacock
> and outlandish pelican.
> We discreetly ignored
> the sigh in the arbour
> and devoted ourselves to iced drinks.
>
> (Gant)

This is *vers libre* which would not be materially affected by being printed as prose. In other words it has no integral rhythm, and its form is dictated,

I feel, by the search for a series of images sufficiently unusual to keep us awake. This is a general criticism, not only of Gant, but of much American work: the difference is that a larger proportion of poets in America are aware of it, and are devising means of avoiding it.

> There is no awareness in the morning
> ice brings over the river
> an upper lip that closes on the bank
> and refuses entirely to show teeth
> on the surface the eye
> takes a step a slide
> proves the moor vacant
> the sky closes and swallows (Swetzoff)

I do not want to make too much of a contrast between a dozen selected lines from two unrelated poets, but the unlikeness of the tradition struck me in reading. Leaving aside the fact that Swetzoff is immeasurably the better poet, his rhythmic patterns although well covered make it quite impossible to read him as prose. The feel for this quality, the genuine *vers libre*, seems to have been in the bones of U.S. writing since Whitman. It is equally strong in France. I wish more of our English middle-zone could realise it, and the enormous technical advantage of the English tonic accent in developing such a pattern.

Except in his humorous poems, and in one or two early lyrics, MacNeice's reputation depends almost wholly on his technical neatness. I am not sure whether that is praise or dispraise: he is emphatically a scholar and a satirist, and there is a kind of reserve about his lyricism which makes him impose an intellectual quantity (usually an image—

> As here in Oxford shadow the dark-weathered
> Astrakhan rustication of the arches
> Puts a small world in quotes,

between what he feels and what he writes—in other words, detailed or witty observation becomes a cloak for feeling. MacNeice's sympathy lies in what he does not write. The reader is in the conspiracy. The fellow-feeling is there if you are like-minded. I do not agree that he has become a less interesting poet in his later books—"The Strand"—in this book, for instance, is as directly successful as any of the earlier poems. It has rather startling echoes of a greatly different Irish writer, F. R. Higgins, but like the others and wholly unlike Higgins it is reserved, not expansive.

MacNeice is invariably bracketed with the other poets of the Auden school—the only real similarity at the present time lies in the fact that Auden, Spender and MacNeice have all had to reorientate themselves, and MacNeice is the only one who has not done so explicitly. His work gives me the impression that he regards his poetry and his ideas as emphatically his own business, and is only ready to discuss them in public through the poems themselves. His lyrical style is entirely separate from

his showmanship as a radio dramatist. I think showmanship is the right word. The native MacNeice is far too satirical and moves far too fast for any audience. His radio plays seem to me to compromise quite consciously and rather maliciously with the taste and intelligence of his audience. I do not think most writers or listeners have yet realised quite how much work MacNeice has already done in developing a broadcast poetic idiom, but I am equally certain that it is on his collections of poetry that he would expect to be judged. I think his best commendation is probably that as a satirist he can make almost anyone feel uncomfortable, and that his satire is that of a scholar who knows his whereabouts. I like the harshness of this book more than its occasional douceurs, and beside the satire it contains the poem I mentioned, "The Strand", which is possibly MacNeice's finest short poem so far.

Essays in Language and Literature (Allan Wingate, 10s. 6d.); *Apollinaire to Aragon*, by W. J. Strachan (Methuen, 7s. 6d.).

REVIEWED BY

GEORGE WOODCOCK

The deceptions of language have set philosophers by the ears for centuries, and the study of the relation of words to thought and emotion has increased in late years to such an extent that it has become a really major feature of many schools of thought, while there is hardly a single thinker or critic who has not in some way given close attention to the problem of words.

Some, like the Evangelist, declare that "In the Beginning was the Word," and maintain that, since thought always seems built up from linguistic symbols, it is born of language—that man became a thinking animal because he became a speaking animal. Others, while acknowledging the inextricability of language from the external world, the real or apparent world according to their philosophical attitude, maintain that language itself is the child of action, proceeding from the thought and the deed like the Holy Ghost in a new Trinity.

But, while such arguments seem to partake of the ancient chicken-egg controversy, and it might well be contended that thought and its means of expression have developed side by side in such a way that we cannot say whether one preceded or proceeded from the other, it remains true that, as man's universe expands, as language has to express more ideas and concrete facts on more planes of awareness, it becomes vague and inaccurate, begins to lose its exact contact with reality, and at times seems to be enjoying a steadily more independent existence, in which it can mislead our thoughts, so that whole concepts can be based purely on words, without any roots in the concrete reality of life.

In practical life this misleading function of words has done more than anything else to deliver us into the hands of men whose profession is merely the manipulation of words, into the grip of propagandists and politicians who, finding that concrete facts are somewhat unreliable supporters of a party cause, have done their best to base their appeals to popular feelings on catchwords and slogans possessed of an emotive appeal which gives them a quite different meaning as part of political propaganda than in their original and true contexts. Blood, Earth, Flag, Mother, are words which function in this way, so that some of them, e.g. Blood, have a whole range of references, both religious and political, which carry them beyond actuality, right into the realm of mythology. Others, such as Freedom and Justice, have of their very nature a vagueness of definition which gives the propagandist every opportunity to detach them from any clear and concrete meaning and manipulate them in such a way that the thoughts he raises in the minds of his audience are wholly false and rootless.

But perhaps even more disquieting is the way in which, without any deliberate intention to deceive on the part of its users, language has become so imprecise that we must always be on our guard against presenting it in such a way that an involuntary ambiguity or deception arises. Perhaps a development of this kind is inevitable as soon as we go beyond talking of concrete objects and very simple actions, and it may be that all we can do is to make the margin of error as slight as possible. But the problem of words remains a frightening one, before which it is often tempting to accept the despairing attitude implied in the comment of Spina in Silone's *Bread and Wine*:

> "There are many distinctions that are distinctions of words only. There are many alliances that are alliances of words only. In no century have words been so perverted from their natural purpose of putting man in touch with man as they are today. To speak and to deceive (often to deceive oneself) have become almost synonymous. So far has this process gone that I, wishing to speak to you sincerely and fraternally, with no other object in mind than that of understanding you and making myself understood by you, if I begin to search for the right words, remain in perplexity, so false, equivocal, hackneyed and compromised they are. Therefore it is perhaps better to keep silent and to trust the silence."

But silence can be even more deceptive than words, since in our minds we always make it speak, and too often wrongly furnish another person's silence with the words we either wish or dread to hear. For the most part, we can only communicate in words, and certainly, for all their inadequacy to the task, they are the sole means by which we may even hope to speak at all clearly on any but the most rudimentary level.

Thus it seems to me that, in so far as one can speak of a social duty for writers, and for poets in particular, it lies not, as some contend, in becoming the accredited mouthpieces to be used by political factions in the

further twisting of language into the distortions of popular mythology, but in assuring that words are used purely and accurately, and that each thought is expressed as directly and clearly as the limitations of language permit. Except for a few party fanatics who, like Lenin, regard truth as a bourgeois illusion and see words only as having the meaning which the speaker or writer chooses to confer on them, I am sure most writers will not reject this attitude. I am sure, moreover, that, again with the above exception, they will also agree that, whatever its limitations, language should always be regarded as a potential means of communication, possessed of certain standards common to all men speaking the same tongue, common even, by translation, to all men.

But there is always a gap between what we desire and what we achieve, and, with the best intentions, we cannot but recognise that language is always a faulty instrument. Yet that is perhaps the better reason why writers should study its nature and uses all the more carefully.

The French have always been more conscious than the English of the need for accuracy in words. But their attempts at an academic control over language have, perhaps naturally enough, shown no more success than the linguistic chaos of English usage, as is shown by the vast amount that has been written and is still being written by French critics on this vexed subject.

Some of this writing is collected in a recent short volume of *Essays on Language and Literature*, edited by J. L. Hervesi (Allan Wingate, 10s. 6d.). The essays are by Proust, Valery, Sartre, Jean Paulhan, Francis Ponge and Brice Parain, and, although in some cases their strict relevance to the subject of the collection is not wholly apparent, they certainly present a suggestive variety of opinions.

Not the least interesting feature is the fact that the authors represent a fairly representative selection of the various attitudes towards language adopted by modern writers and literary philosophers, although the essay by Proust, "Days of Reading" is perhaps more valuable as an illustration of his personal stylistic problems as a practising writer than for any contribution he makes to the general discussion of the problem of language.

Jean Paulhan discusses, in an anecdotal manner, the problem of how far words are in fact signs, and how far they exist in conversation and writing independently of meaning. His conclusions seem to indicate that language is a whole and that any attempts to break it down in the search for meaning are liable to be dangerous in their effect. The writer should study words for their own value and be sure of his power over them before he begins to concern himself with the ideas they seem to express.

Francis Ponge, on the other hand, takes the view that it is necessary for us to take for granted no combination of words sanctioned by tradition, that even such commonly accepted terms as "hard as a stone" must be examined to see whether the emotional weight they carry does in fact convey a true impression of the objects described. His attitude is thus, in

appearance at least, almost the opposite of that advocated by Paulhan.

Sartre, basing his essay on the well-worn Existentialist ideas, comes to the conclusion that language, viewed from one aspect, has developed in such a way that, far from words helping us to understand experience, they have actually tended to create a barrier between us and life. Yet, inadequate and at times obstructive though language may be, it is only by its use that we can even attempt to describe the world. For the Existentialist, the dilemma seems to have no ready solution.

To the attitudes expressed by all these writers, the answer seems to be, not that words have failed us, not that language has somehow gained a malignant life of its own, but that, however much we may try to evade the responsibility, we have ourselves allowed it to slip away from reality. Any tendency to allow life and language to become divorced seems dangerous, for by giving words an independent existence, we ourselves become their slaves. Words detached from reality are the Janissaries of a totalitarian mode of thought, divorced from the facts of actual existence, and it seems to me that, however excessive the attitude of Ponge may seem, it contains the germ of truth which the others lack. We must examine our words carefully and strive always to make our language as purely expressive of life as we can.

This view is given much support by the essay of Paul Valery, "Poetry and Abstract Thought", which I have left for closer examination, since it is of more direct interest to students of poetry. Valery sets out to discuss the problem of the division that has arisen in the general mind between the ideas of poetry and abstract thought. It is a common superstition that poetry, being "inspired" or motivated by the "subconscious", has no relation to abstract thought. It should be observed, in passing, that this idea is of comparatively recent origin and stems largely from the nineteenth century romantics. It is clear that Dante and Milton, Lucretius, Dryden and even Shelley, saw no hard and fast division between poetry and abstract thought, and found no difficulty in expressing their philosophical ideas in verse which few people would deny the title of poetry, while in our own day such writers as T. S. Eliot and Herbert Read have produced poetry into which abstract thought is happily welded. Moreover, as is shown by the practical experiment at Buffalo University which I discussed in the last issue of *The Poetry Review,* the part played by deliberate thought in the production of poems, even of the "romantic" type, is much greater than many readers think.

In his essay Valery makes an important point by distinguishing between poetry and "the poetic state". It is true, he grants, that the first suggestion for a poem may come apparently "by accident". But the poem itself is much more than accidental. For, "Images brought together *by accident* are only *by accident* harmonious." The function of the poet is not only to experience the "poetic state", but also to induce it in others, and it is in the working out of the poem, which produces the response in others, that abstract thought occurs.

This does not mean that the thought used in poetry is necessarily the same as that used in concrete actions, or that the poet manipulates language in the same way as in everyday conversation or even in a philosophical treatise. Clearly he does not. Starting with the language of everyday life, he detaches it from its original context, breaks it down into non-language, and from this builds a new language, that of poetry, adapted to express, instead of "ideas", states of consciousness, and, instead of things present, those which are not present.

Valery tells the story of Degas, who aspired to poetry, but found that he could not express his "ideas". When he stated his difficulty to Mallarmé the latter replied, "Poetry, my dear Degas, is not made with ideas, but with *words*." Valery agrees with Mallarme, and goes on to say:

> "When Degas talked about ideas, he was thinking of those private and unspoken passages, of those images, which could have been expressed in words. But those words, those intimate phrases which he meant when he talked about his 'ideas', all those intentions and perceptions of the mind, are not what make poetry. Something else is needed, some modification, some transformation, whether sudden or not sudden, spontaneous or not spontaneous, involving hard work or not involving hard work, which must interpose itself between the activity of thought when it produces ideas, and the multiplicity of problems and their solution which are present in the consciousness while a poem is taking shape. A poem is a form of speech quite different from other forms of speech. It obeys a bizarre discipline and responds to no necessity *unless it be a necessity created by itself*. It tells of things that are in no ordinary sense *present*, of things felt in the profound secrecy of the self. It is a curious form of speech which seems to be uttered by someone who *is not the someone who gives it form*, and to be spoken to *somebody who is not somebody who hears it*. In short, poetry is a *language within a language*."

But, like the other language of day-to-day life, it has its own accuracy, and requires its own form of discipline, involving effort and constant consideration and reconsideration. It is here, in this work of constructing a poem, that abstract thought enters in and moulds the pattern of language. Of course, that is putting Valery's argument very crudely, and those who are interested in the questions of poetry and language will find it full of suggestions, even if it brings no solution to a problem that seems often insoluble.

In the little space left to me, I would recommend W. J. Strachan's little volume of translations, *Apollinaire to Aragon*, a selection which embraces work by some thirty modern French poets. Mr. Strachan has become one of our most capable translators, and the present collection shows his work at its best. In general, the selection is an interesting one, except perhaps that too much space has been devoted to Aragon, whose verses sink too often into the most ephemeral of rhetoric.

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HOWARD SERGEANT

In Public, in Private, Edwin Denby (Decker Press, Illinois, $2.50); *Ships and Other Figures,* William Meredith (Princeton University Press, $2.00, London—Geoffrey Cumberlege, 11s. 6d.); *Poems 1940/1947,* Theodore Spencer (Harvard University Press, $2.75, London — Geoffrey Cumberlege, 15s.); *Selected Poems,* John Crowe Ransom (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 9s.); *Poems 1920/1945,* Allen Tate (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 10s. 6d.).

For most readers in this country contemporary American poetry has mainly been represented by the sensational incoherences of Kenneth Patchen, the typographical devices of E. E. Cummings, and the "robustness and vigour" of Conrad Aiken. It is true that the work of a few other poets, such as Kenneth Rexroth, Karl Shapiro, Dunstan Thompson and Harry Brown, is also known, but that knowledge tends to confirm rather than modify the false impressions created. In spite of Mr. Oscar Williams' recent assertion that "Whitmanseque exuberance has passed from the American scene," the general opinion here seems to be that American poetry is both profuse and blatant. For Mr. George Barker, who should be something of an authority on the subject, "it resembles the Fat Lady at a Circus; there's a lot of her but not much is desirable"—an observation which might be applied with equal force and pertinence to English poetry.

Little in the way of assessment and serious criticism has been attempted by English critics. Too many of them, when dealing with the work of an American poet, make it the occasion for demonstrating their own particular brand of humour or indulging in a sense of superiority, based presumably on no securer foundation than that of an older tradition. It is frequently stated, and, it must be admitted, with justification, that much American poetry is reminiscent of Pound, Eliot or Auden; but the influence of these three poets is certainly no more pronounced than that of Hopkins, Eliot and Dylan Thomas upon modern English poetry. Hasty generalisations of this nature will lead us nowhere in the task of evaluation. What is most needed at the present time is a more responsible and conscientious approach to the work of individual writers.

From that aspect the first book on my list is a disappointment. Mr. Edwin Denby provides what might be described as a poetic version of the 'wide Boy' in both the *Public* and *Private* sections of his book. The scope of his work seldom extends beyond the superficialities of existence

in New York (typical pieces are "The Climate," "The Subway," "Standing on the Streetcorner," "People on Sunday," and "Elegy—The Streets") and his photographic eye enables him to register all those features to which we have become so accustomed—the traffic, bridges, neon-lighted streets, skyscrapers and saloons, etc.—in American films. Not that he experiences any warm feeling for city life or observes more than the average city-dweller. On that score I must disagree with the publishers who announce that this volume of verse "anatomises those scenes (i.e., New York) with a vision whose penetration and breadth far excels the qualities of any camera lens." As if to contradict their words, they have included a series of excellent photographs taken, by Mr. Rudolph Burckhardt, which is far more revealing than the verse itself. For his purpose Mr. Denby relies upon a cynical outlook and colloquial idiom remarkable only for the slang expressions he manages to compress into it:

> "It sneaked up like it was a sweet thrill."
> "Hey, dope, can you take it? say, you better can."

The admonition is necessary. The *Sonnet Sequence: Dishonour,* dedicated to "the filthy double of me who attends to secret matters I don't care to treat," contains some interesting thoughts but the form is totally unsuitable for what the poet has to express. I am even less inclined than Mr Denby to deal with its subject matter.

With *Ships and Other Figures* one moves to another sphere of technique and vision. The author, Mr. William Meredith, served as a naval aviator during the war years, which may account for the air of detachment surrounding the poems inspired by that experience. There is none of the usual frustration or bewilderment and little sense of urgency revealed in these poems. "Days like to-day we are the clouds' men—and what they do all day is our concern," says Mr. Meredith, as he perches upon his cumulo-nimbus cloud, wrapped in sober meditation, and watching the gulls sporting in the ship's wake. When he does attempt a touch of realism, as in *Battlewagon,* he loses both dignity and control:

> "Old Billy-de-damned bang bang flashy-in-battle
> Castle not obsolete with turrets grinding deep
> Into chambers of oh by jesus noise,
> All for one or at most a few battles."

I do not wish to imply that the above quotation is in any way characteristic of Mr Meredith's style. Rather is it the exception. For he is a competent writer, capable of attracting and holding the reader's attention by a shrewd restraint and the authenticity of his emotions. He has the scholar's wholesome respect for form and his diction, finely balanced and precise, leaves nothing to be desired on the grounds of clarity. In his most successful poems he shows a pleasing facility for developing a conventional subject in an unconventional manner:

"Do not embrace your mind's new negro friend
Or embarrass the blackballed jew with memberships:
There must be years of atonement first, and even then
You may still be the blundering raconteur
With the wrong story, and they may still be free."

"Nothing is true but paradox; Beginning is the end," writes Mr. Theodore Spencer in his *Poems 1940/1947* and his work gives abundant proof of his loyalty to his convictions. Whether he is writing of religion or history or his favourite subject—the relationship between man and woman—the paradox creeps in, often delightful and occasionally daring. *Epitaph* shows him at his best. Perhaps there are too many poems of this type in the book, and not enough with this quality. Paradox, to be successful, should not be expected. After a time one begins to anticipate the twist of thought so that it not only loses its flavour but becomes insipid to the mental palate. A number of the pieces are weakened by pointless repetition, too. To harp on the defects of Mr. Spencer's method, however, would be unjust. At least it is individual and, to me, extremely refreshing. *The Alumni,* in an entirely different vein, is ambitious in conception and reveals Mr. Theodore Spencer as an artist of no mean capacity.

Early in the 1920's a group of young poets in Tennessee, calling themselves "The Fugitives" as if in protest against the vulgarity and commercial values of modern civilisation, started a movement which has since exercised a considerable influence upon American poetry. Outstanding among this group of neo-metaphysical poets, which included Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Laura Riding and Merrill Moore, was John Crowe Ransom, then Instructor of English at Vanderbilt University. In 1937 Mr. Ransom left Vanderbilt to become Professor of Poetry at Kenyon College, Ohio, where he founded the *Kenyon Review* and gathered round him another group of distinguished poets and critics. If Mr. Oscar Williams' statement that "American poetry has a more scholarly, a more academically involved concern over vocabulary and structure than the English" is at all authoritative, the trend is largely due to the efforts of Mr. Ransom and his fellow-fugitives. The publishers of his latest book, *Selected Poems,* are therefore to be congratulated upon their enterprise in introducing him, if belatedly, to English readers.

The contents of this book have been selected from the work of twenty-five years and it is an indication of Mr. Ransom's integrity and self-critical faculties that the result is a collection of only forty-two poems. Elegance is the keynote. But it is not merely a stylistic performance, a deft manipulation of phrases to titillate the æsthetic senses of his public; for his virtuosity is combined with a tenderness that is as subtle in effect as it is controlled in emergence. A good example of this is *Dead Boy:*

"The little cousin is dead, by foul subtraction,
A green bough from Virginia's aged tree,
And none of the county kin like the transaction,
Nor some of the world of outer dark, like me.

A boy not beautiful, nor good, nor clever,
A black cloud full of storms too hot for keeping,
A sword beneath his mother's heart—yet never
Woman bewept her babe as this is weeping."

where the emotional power is gradually stepped up from the almost ironic understatement of "by foul subtraction, A green bough from Virginia's aged tree" through the various stages of "A boy not beautiful, nor good . . ." and "A black cloud full of storms . . ." until it bursts forth with that highly-charged expression of utter grief—"yet never Woman bewept her babe as this is weeping." Whether it was intentional or not, this sentence seems to carry with it the associated richness of the lines from *John* 11, before the raising of Lazarus: "Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!" Perhaps the poignancy of the atmosphere created by the poem is intensified because Mr. Ransom makes one suddenly *aware* of the finality of death: in this instance there is to be no triumphant resurrection. The tomb is sealed. The little cousin is dead.

The same lightness of tone and gentle irony in the presence of death is evident in other poems:

"Here lies a lady of beauty and high degree.
Of chills and fever she died, of fever and chills."
(*Here lies a Lady.*)

"We shall come tomorrow morning, who were not to have her love,
We shall bring no face of envy but a gift of praise and lilies
To the stately ceremonial we are not the heroes of."
(*Emily Hardcastle, Spinster.*)

"But now go the bells, and we are ready,
In one house we are sternly stopped
To say we are vexed at her brown study,
Lying so primly propped."
(*Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter.*)

yet the ultimate impression is probably much deeper than if the grand elegiac manner had been adopted by the poet.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, he is not solely preoccupied with mortality. His subject matter ranges from a consideration

of *What Ducks Require* to a philosophical *Address to the Scholars of New Jersey*, from the humorous *Survey of Literature* to the story of *Judith of Bethulia* who was, we are told, "Beautiful as the flying legend of some leopard." A few of these poems could undoubtedly be described as slight, but even in these his wit and his curious idiom, incorporating Biblical echoes, Latinisms and modern Tennessee, make their inclusion worth while.

Mr. Allen Tate's *Poems 1920/1945*, from the same publishing house, are equally well constructed and acute, though his style is more academic than that of Mr. Ransom and possesses all the concentration and firmness of the best metaphysical poetry:

"Summer, this is our flesh,
The body you let mature;
If now while the body is fresh
You take it, shall we give
The heart, lest heart endure
The mind's tattering
Blow of greedy claws?
Shall mind itself still live
If like a hunting king
It falls to the lion's jaws?"
(*Seasons of the Soul.*)

A charge often levelled against the Fugitives is that, in their fastidious rejection of present-day values, they have become unduly concerned with form and verbal dexterity to the exclusion of significant content; that they have, in other words, merely retreated to another type of Ivory Tower. Whilst Mr. Tate has been influenced by the classical poets (Dante certainly; and possibly Juvenal, Horace and Euripedes), and during the war years was engaged upon an English translation of *Pervigilium Veneris*, he is obviously conscious of the problems of his age:

"Come, old woman, save
Your sons who have gone down
Into the burning cave:
Come, mother, and lean
At the window with your son
And gaze through its light frame
These fifteen centuries
Upon the shirking scene
Where men, blind, go lame:
Then, mother of silences,
Speak, that we may hear;
Listen, while we confess
That we conceal our fear;

Regard us, while the eye
Discerns by sight or guess
Whether, as sheep foregather
Upon their crooked knees,
We have begun to die;
Whether your kindness, mother,
Is mother of silences."

Similarly, although he is considered to be a southern regionalist poet, he never descends to the parochial level. When he is unable to psychoanalyse and dissect, he utilises the power of classical knowledge or allopathic satire—as in his *Ode to our Young Pro-consuls of the Air*?

"Take off, O gentle youth,
And coasting India
Scale crusty Everest
Whose mystic crest
Resists your truth;
And spying far away.

Upon the Tibetan plain
A limping caravan,
Dive, and exterminate
The Lama, late
Survival of old pain.
Go kill the dying swan."

Mr. Tate's dry crystalline note will appeal to all readers who have grown weary of the lushness and cliché-ridden sentimentality evinced by so many writers to-day.

Trees and Other Poems, by Joyce Kilmer (Citadel Press 3s. 6d.).

REVIEWED BY
PATRICIA FFINCH

"Trees" by Joyce Kilmer is a poem well known to many thousands of people whose interest in serious poetry is otherwise non-existent. Set to music it is common knowledge, parodied it is the comedian's godsend, and yet no other poem of his has achieved even a slight degree of this fame.

Kilmer's work was unknown in England until, in 1941, twenty-three years after his death in the first World War, the Citadel Press published a selection which has since been twice reprinted. The book contains about one-third of his total work, and shows that he was a young man passionately interested in life, and with a deep religious faith which was all-important to him. His work is careful, orderly, and he condemns unhesitatingly the Young Poet who

". . . . . screams forever
About his sex and his soul"

and affirms with simplicity

"They only sing who are struck dumb by God".

His poems are formal, his rhymes scrupulous and his metres conventional, but there is a singing quality throughout his work which is helped rather than hindered by this conformation—his images are often fresh and clear:

"The air is like a butterfly
With frail blue wings."

and through the book runs a vein of strength which might, had it been given time to develop, have finally banished the tendency to the expected and the use of the poetic cliché.

This strength is particularly obvious in the poem "Madness"—by far the most individual in the collection—in which Kilmer describes the exultation of the moon in her power over the mind of man.

"Not iron bars, nor flashing spears,
Not land, nor sky, nor sea,
Nor love's artillery of tears
Can keep mine own from me.

Serene, unchanging, ever fair,
I smile with secret mirth
And in a net of mine own hair
I swing the captive earth."

Art and Social Responsibility, by Alex Comfort (Falcon Press, 7s. 6d.); *Songs of the Restoration Theatre*, ed. by Philip John Stead (Methuen 8s. 6d.); *Selected Poems*, by Christopher Smart, ed. by Ruthven Todd (Grey Walls Press, 3s. 6d.); *Robert Bloomfield*: a selection of Poems, ed. by Roland Gant (Grey Walls Press, 3s. 6d.); *Selected Poems of William Wordsworth*, with an Introduction by Montgomery Belgion (Grey Walls Press, 3s. 6d.); *Matthew Arnold*: an Introduction and a Selection by Clifford Dyment (Phoenix House, 8s. 6d.); *The Collected Nonsense Songs of Edward Lear*, with the original illustrations and an Introduction by Leonard Russell (Grey Walls Press, 3s. 6d.).

REVIEWED BY

DEREK STANFORD

Art and Social Responsibility is obviously one of the most important books (among which we must also name Herbert Read's *Poetry and Anarchism* and D. S. Savage's *Personal Principle*) dealing with that body of ideas which underlies the movement in letters loosely described as neo-romanticism. As might be expected from the author of *The Power House* and that explosive volume *The Signal to Engage*, the present work is thoughtful and urgent. It is also narrow and unhistoric.

Briefly speaking, Dr. Comfort's contention is that "there is no correspondence between the physical essence of the universe and the psychological and so-called "spiritual" aspirations of man—that no human activity can be said to have "permanent" or "absolute" significance, and that ethics and aesthetics exist because we make them and assert them, not in conformity with Platonic absolutes but in the teeth of material reality. That the common enemy of man is Death, that the common tie of man is ultimate victimhood, and that anyone who, in attempting to escape the realisation of that victimhood in himself, increases its incidence upon others, is a traitor to humanity and an ally to death."

"Classic and romantic," then, Dr. Comfort argues, "stand for more than differences of style. The classic sees man as master, the romantic sees him as victim of his environment." From this latter vision, Dr. Comfort maintains, there springs the impulse towards salvation, that Messianic urge to free mankind from the various tyrannies that oppress it. Romanticism, then, envisaged in this fashion, is a distinctly Promethean art. Its duty—as Dr. Comfort puts it—is "to speak for the voiceless", to articulate suffering, and, through this articulation of pain, lead those who suffer to unite and revolt. Contrary, therefore, to a certain opinion of romanticism as a non-social art, Dr. Comfort considers its essence to reside in an intransigent social conscience—a partisan passion to liberate man from the machinations of "history" and "the State". Romanticism, Dr. Comfort asserts, is "art for responsibility's sake".

Taking this new slogan "responsibility" as the key-word to his system, Dr. Comfort next proceeds to elaborate further innovations of thought anent his romantic ideology. Romantic poetry, he considers, assumes as its cardinal subject the tragedy of human impermanence, the fear and fact of death, the pathos of mortality; whilst in the novel romanticism principally manifests itself in dealing with the tragedy which arises from man's irresponsibility's towards man. We thus arrive at the original conclusion of having Zola presented to us as a great romantic novelist. A single hypothesis inverts the whole world!

With regard to contemporary art, Dr. Comfort distinguishes two *formes frustes* of romanticism which lack nothing in artistic validity save the conscious sense of human community. "One might call them", he continues, "the exit via schizophrenia and the exit via childhood. The first is the explicit but uncritical acceptance of lunacy . . . and the second the concern with inanimate and purely intellectual properties—the concern with colour or form of a child who plays with bricks . . . To the first group belong symbolism and all the forms, satirical or serious, of irrationalism, and to the second Cubism and Constructivism."

Such, in short, are the chief affirmations, to whose validity I now attend.

To begin with, it will be apparently clear that Dr. Comfort's concept of romanticism differs very widely, and very radically, from other concepts of that ideology held by its apologists, past and present; and that much as these thinkers have differed amongst themselves, Dr. Comfort differs from them a hundred times more so. Thus it is not only its modern defenders—Herbert Read*, D. S. Savage, Henry Treece, etc.—whose theories Dr. Comfort implicitly contests, but also its founders and pioneers—Schelling, Coleridge, de Quincey, etc.—whose connotations are likewise disregarded. For example, Dr. Comfort states that "the romantic bases his ethic upon his belief in the hostility or the neutrality of the Universe"; an opinion that completely ignores the great part which Pantheism played in the ideology of the early romantics, who believed that nature was constituted not of a chaos but of a pattern, accordance with which led to harmony, rejection of which resulted in pain. This idea under various forms is present in the work of Novalis and Schelling, of Rousseau, Shelley, Wordsworth, and Holderlin. Dr. Comfort, however, was looking the other way. Another fact Dr. Comfort does not face is that very many of the romantic writers (called so by their contemporaries and most critics since) professed a belief in systems of thought which he would, no doubt, term reactionary, but which they called hierarchical (remark the philosophies of Coleridge and the Schlegels).

This refusal to consider all but a specially selected portion of the historical data of the movement leaves Dr. Comfort's exposition of romanticism without the guarantee of continuity about it. What he presents has very

* The similarities between the thought of Herbert Read and Dr. Comfort, as I attempt to show later, are incidental rather than basic.

little reference to what we have heard on the matter before; and instead of changing our opinion by a re-assemblage and modification of the evidence already in our possession, he attempts to convert us by dispensing with past data, and by introducing "special exhibits" to prove his case (e.g. Breughel of "The Murder of the Holy Innocents" as a leading romantic painter, and Zola of *Germinal* as a great romantic novelist).

Had Dr. Comfort been chiefly concerned with a purely speculative idea of romanticism, this presence of frail or faulty evidence would have been an affair of no consequence at all. As it is, however, Dr. Comfort attempts to trace the development of romanticism from the poet's reaction to the Industrial Revolution up to the political events of today. This being so, his extreme partiality and esoteric selection of facts from the body of historical data generally weakens the case he presents.

Just as Dr. Comfort is isolated in his exposition of romanticism in relation to its champions of the past, so in relation to its modern exponents we find the same discrepancy. Much, for example, as he quotes Herbert Read (and much as their political ideas coincide in questions of policy and practical action) there is no common philosophical base supporting the opinions of these two critics. Comfort envisages the universe, rather in the manner of Jean-Paul Sartre, as hostile or indifferent to man, an organum of a totally different order to that which constitutes the organism which is man. Read, on the other hand, views man as a part of a larger all-abiding pattern;* and this integration of man and environment, glimpsed by means of a more catholic metaphysic, gives to this critic's various statements a wider generality and absence of prejudice which we lack in the younger writer.

Perhaps the one literary critic of idea with whom Dr. Comfort partly shares his concept of romanticism is the early Middleton Murry. ("Romanticism," writes the former, "is a way of thinking, not a style of writing"; while the latter, in his book *The Problem of Style* published in 1922, observes that "the pregnant distinction is not between the Romantic and the Realist, but between the Romantic and the Classical writer." "This distinction," he continues, "is of the utmost importance, but it is philosophical and ethical rather than literary.") Both of these critics have realised that romanticism had its origin in those displacements of age-long centres of stability in the life of institutions and of individuals, and both have accordingly sought beneath the distinctions of styles and contents to its psycho-social source. Both, too, have felt the reformist urge, which has led them to present the substance of their researches in a certain efficacious but pre-determined manner. They have learnt the art of forceful argument, the rhetoric of simple appeal, the logic of the fundamentalist—largely at the cost of forgetting half the facts.

* "As for our knowledge of the external world," he writes in *Poetry and Anarchism*, "in so far as we can be certain of the objectivity of such knowledge, I observe that it reveals a certain structural harmony in the universe which is of the greatest significance, and which we may, if we have use for the symbol, identify with God."

"A revolution in the imagery of poetry is in reality a revelation in metaphysics." So observes the American critic Edmund Wilson, whose statement Dr. Comfort takes as an epigraph to the book under notice. Now with this observation I whole-heartedly agree, believing that an indispensable part of the function of literary criticism consists just in this assessment of a writer's metaphysic *as manifest in his imagery*. Inductive, however, as are certain conclusions of Dr. Comfort concerning history, his conclusions with regard to literature and art are mostly of an *a priori* nature. His eye is on the blue-print: he has ceased to see the object.

With these reservations on his book as a work of literary criticism, there remains for me but to observe certain qualities present in this writing to an unusually high degree: a deep unegotistic sincerity; a sense of human dignity, afflicted yet retained; a high and tragic seriousness; and a trick of lacerating the hypocrite and liar.

Applying Dr. Comfort's touchstone of "responsibility" to the works of other poets herewith to be considered, we arrive at some novel and interesting conclusions.

To begin with, the poets of the Restoration theatre appear before us in double aspect: both as responsible and irresponsible writers. In so far as their poetry executes a frank autopsy of physical passion, in so far as they sharply analyse the element of *amour-propre* in love, in so far as they study the facts of the flesh, the statistics of adultery, the logic of desire, their poetry is medicinal and astringent. It tells a bitter truth it is good for us to hear. In so far, however, as the poet accepts these general shortcomings of the human condition (urging his contemporaries—as Thomas d'Urfey does—to "Love on and Drink,/'Tis a folly to think/Of a Mystery out of our reaches"), and in so far as he proposes no solutions or ameliorations with regard to the betrayal of man by man, of man by woman, and vice versa, then Dr. Comfort's touchstone leads us to think that the poet is writing irresponsibly. His statements are true, but the truths are negative. He is telling us the truths of irresponsibility. In other words the poet is deficient in any constructive vision of man; he lacks an imaginative sense of solidarity; he has failed to attain to a social adulthood.

Revealing, here, as the application of the canon of "responsibility" has proved, it fails to estimate or take into account the writer's sense of responsibility towards the nature of his own art; for if the poets of the Restoration theatre were apt to connive at the egoism and cynical hedonism which they reflected, their attitude towards their own medium was severe. Their conscience was æsthetic. They were purists of form.

Half-efficient only as our touchstone has proved when dealing with the Restoration poets, its final irrelevance as a measure of poetic expression becomes more obvious when applied to the verses of Christopher Smart.

Composer, as Middleton Murry describes him, of a "Franciscan poetry *in excelsis*," there was nothing of the spiritual "slummer" or didactic pulpiteer about Smart. He was not concerned with the rights or wrongs of the

social ethos in which he lived, and which every now and then dispatched him to the madhouse. His business, he felt, was with deity direct; and his works which were written in the tongue of beatitude resulted from a long-sustained picnic with God. This sense of blessing, of fanatical joy, of a lyrically creative naiveté of heart, is something which the gauge of "responsibility" hardly helps to elucidate or measure.

Nor is its efficacy better demonstrated when dealing with the case of Robert Bloomfield; for sincere, no doubt, as that poet's protests were when speaking of the system of Land Enclosures, it is not in these fustian-pathetic phrases that the real poetic value of "The Farmer's Boy" resides. Rather its worth for posterity consists—to borrow the words of Roland Gant—"in its simplicity and the minute observation and description of rural life"; in those plain uninflated images of things; those lyrical "copies" of some small detail, accurate, neat, and unpretentious, often met with in this poem: "the small dust-coloured beetle," "the tender speckled moth," "the vaulting grasshopper of glossy green."

Again, in briefly examining the cardinal quality of the last three poets—Wordsworth, Arnold, and Edward Lear—we find little to advance Dr. Comfort's contention that the æsthetic wholeness of any work of art depends upon, and is in direct proportion to, the human responsibility assumed by the artist and proclaimed in his art.

Wordsworth, the first of these poets, retreated from the faith and responsibilities of love,* from his early and generous political commitments to become a kind of domestic hermit, a *rentier* recluse of the Lakes. This, I suppose, for Dr. Comfort, would damn him as a poet out of hand. Yet in spite of the evasive "self-preoccupation", which Montgomery Belgion attributes to him, in spite of the fact that Arnold acknowledged his nature-philosophy to be a mere illusion, Wordsworth remains a great romantic writer, whose best work tells us—as Montgomery Belgion puts it—"of a vague but poignant melancholy and of the haunting strangeness of life masked in the garb of common day."

Arnold, the second case in question, provides an example of the poet whose powers of expression were cramped; whose imaginative fertility was slowly exhausted through his sense of duty with regard to his vocation triumphing over his sense of pleasure. We have only to compare such works of his as *Courage* or *Rugby Chapel* with *Apollo* or *Philomela* to observe that "I ought to" usurping "I want to" resulted in a lowering of his true poetic pitch. Indeed, this descent in lyrical pressure was something always threatening the poet, possessed as he was—as Henry James remarked—of "a temperance, a kind of modesty of expression, which is at the same time an artistic reserve". From this it will be seen that a slight reflective check upon his act of intuitive utterance was sufficient to drive inspiration away. The self-conscious prophet replaced the spontaneous poet.

* His act of walking-out on Marie-Anne Vallon, leaving her to cope with their illegitimate child.

"Arnold . . . as he became a thinker and less of a poet", Clifford Dyment asserts, "equated the functions of poetry with those of religion. Actually, the two are quite distinct, for poetry is but a stage on the way to enlightenment, not the enlightenment itself. In enlightenment the self is annihilated, but before it can be overcome the self must be realised. Poetry is the completest realisation of the self." Its source, in other words, is not an altruistic passion.

Indeed, so little is poetry a philanthropic affair at its inception that some of the most moving verse has been written from a sense of exclusive and intense self-pity. This observation certainly applies to the literary work of Edward Lear—that Pierrot of the nursery, whose plangent undertones of grief won him a following among adults, more sympathetic—if not more devoted—than the audience of minors who commanded his pen.

Yet however much the critic of "responsible" art may deprecate Lear's reaction to life; however much he may stigmatise his work as escapism bred from a tearful "half-response", he again fails to grasp the value of this art unless he observes how Lear has discharged the two chief responsibilities incumbent on the artist: namely, to create his composition out of the deepest elements of his own nature, and in the act of embodying these privacies to give them to the highest possible degree a supra-personal and objective dress.

These duties Edward Lear unfailingly observed. "Change the key ever so little", Aldous Huxley once remarked, "and 'The Dong with a Luminous Nose' would be one of the most memorable romantic poems of the nineteenth century. Think, too, of that exquisite 'Yonghy-Bonghy Bo'!" "Think of it, indeed", Leonard Russell retorts. "It would be Tennyson—lunar Tennyson—were it not uniquely Edward Lear".

Two traits, we may then say, concluding these comments, serve to distinguish romantic poetry: the presence of intuitive utterance, and the use of a set of images which serve at the same time as personal symbols.*

As for Dr. Comfort's definition of romantic literature as "art for responsibility's sake," we would humbly suggest that his words best apply to the art of Promethean heroism—that genre of tragedy which envisages the protagonist as scapegoat or saviour in one, as martyr and tribune of the dispossessed. Now sometimes this tragedy is classical in tone· more often than not it is romantic. To argue, however, that all romantic art is Promethean and heroic in expression is to disregard much palpable data (consider, for example, in nineteenth-century letters the egoistic aspect of romanticism manifest in Byron, in Alfred de Musset, in Reddoes, de Nerval, and Leopardi).

A final word must here be said concerning the sense of responsibility which the editors of the last six volumes brins to bear upon their subject.

* As distinct from the decorative or naturalistic figures of "aesthetic" and Parnassian poetry.

Ideally speaking, an introduction should serve to introduce and assess, and in cases where the work is being reprinted a reassessment should be its chief task. To a certain extent, this need is fulfilled by Montgomery Belgion, Clifford Dyment, and Philip John Stead. The other editors, however, are somewhat inclined to interpret their poets in the limited terms of Taine's "race, environment, and epoch"; a formula more suited to the literary biographer than to the critical impressario.

Forbid Thy Ravens, by Rolfe Humphries. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Selected Poems 1921-1928, by Harold Vinal. Falmouth Publishing House, Portland, Maine.

REVIEWED BY

ALICE HUNT BARTLETT

Forbid Thy Ravens, by Rolfe Humphries. (Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y.)

Rolfe Humphries' gifts and taste have led him to much travel. His talents have been acknowledged by a Guggenheim Fellowship and in 1946 he won the Shelley Memorial Award. *Forbid Thy Ravens* is Mr. Humphries' fourth book of poetry. Delightful we find this poem:

LANDSCAPE OR PORTRAIT

The leaves have hardly turned at all,
This might be August, or July,
Warm, rich, mature, emotional.

Yet just a little crisp and dry,
A little—shall we say? —subdued.
Something has gone, is going, by.

Receding. Greater quietude.
Less light. A more determined will
To curb exuberance of mood.

While richness and emotion still
Mellow decorum's proper claims,
This warmth permits a hint of chill.

The foreword of some ten pages by Henry W. Wells, instructor of literature at Columbia University, in Mr. Vinal's book tells us "This volume gives for the first time a broad perspective upon its author's art".

It is the vogue at this moment for poets reaching mid life to produce such a volume as Mr. Vinal's—his selection of poems by which he hopes to be remembered. From seven volumes of poetry his selection has been made. This gifted author is no stranger to *The Poetry Review*. His founding and editing through a quarter of a century his magazine *Voices* and his constant devotion to poetry makes him an outstanding figure. He is the Secretary of the Poetry Society of America and is diligent in attending all its meetings. I quote one of his later poems:

THE LOST ISLAND

Memory brought us there, no map, compass, ship.
But there was the waste, the waters,
Where time is no more. The island
Alone, aloof in the blue music of space.

There were no people moving, no birds,
But in that fierce instant of sudden light
We knew the island was real, and was Atlantis.
There was reef, atoll, and there in the night

The gleaming isle. In that sharp
Moment of knowledge, without need of chart,
We had found the lost, an enormous pearl that gleamed
Upon the sea's gigantic and moving heart.

SOME NOTES ON AMERICAN POETRY
PART I

G. S. FRASER

The most important American poets of the last thirty or forty years have been, of course, the two famous expatriates, Pound and Eliot. It is not about them, however, that I want to write, or about what is American in them. The most American thing, perhaps (Henry James also had it) is a concern with Europe, with the European tradition, which it is difficult for a European himself to have; Europe seems more a single pattern from the perspective of America than, for instance, from our own island. Pound, perhaps, found most of the specifically English tradition rather a nuisance than otherwise (in the arts, he thought of the English as a nation of gentle, charming and ineffective amateurs); Eliot could absorb it, but in a way that would not have been possible for a born Englishman. We are more surly and dissatisfied with our own habits than visitors are, and perhaps the poet who is a contemporary of Eliot and who carries on our properly insular tradition best is Robert Graves—a poet who, growing mature in the shadow of Eliot and Yeats, and then, when he reached his very peak, overshadowed again by Auden, has never had his proper due. I want to speak of American poets who remained at home, but who may, nevertheless, have shared some of the specifically American characteristics of Pound and Eliot—the passion for learning, the devotion to the past, the sense of present sag, the wish to take everything in. There are not so many names, during this period in American poetry, that stand glitteringly out, as we can offer: there is perhaps a more scrupulous standard of craftsmanship, a quieter honesty, a higher average of talent.

Of the poets who remained in America, perhaps the one with the most obviously glowing talent, though perhaps he never knew quite what to do with it, was John Peale Bishop. He was born in 1892, he was a Virginian, he went to Princeton, and he was there a friend of Scott Fitzgerald and of Edmund Wilson. Wilson said that, after Pound and Eliot had gone, he was probably the "finest poetic instrument" left in America. Fitzgerald gives an attractive sketch of him in his early novel, 'This Side of Paradise." He was, as many American poets are, a successful man in worldly affairs. For a time he was managing editor of the fashionable magazine, "Vanity Fair." In 1943, he was appointed Fellow to the Library of Congress in Comparative Literature, but died, in 1944, of a heart attack. He was a consummate craftsman, but he never took his due place among American poets, partly because he was often content to write in the manner of other poets, because he never quite fixed his own manner. Such

lines as these, for instance, though Yeats could not have written them better, remind one very much of Yeats.

A shanty of the shingled sort
Had led him out to freeze his tears.
A lone gull brought a shrill report
Of a lost sea beyond the piers
To an old man on Ghouls' Wharf.

Such lines as these recall, in their adaptation of a snatch from "The Tempest," a famous passage in "The Waste Land," yet though they make a statement which Mr. Eliot would not wish to make, they make it quite as effectively as he could have made it.

There was One who might have saved
Me from these grave dissolute stones
And parrot eyes. But He is dead,
Christ is dead. And in a grave
Dark as a sightless skull he lies
And of his bones are charnels made.

He had an enormous talent, a complete mastery of language, without having, perhaps, anything that he passionately wanted to say: except to communicate a feeling of terrible but controlled sadness, a feeling which he searches, in his poems, to find an adequate object for. The object comes nearest to being adequate when it is at once visualised with uncanny precision and yet in its nature mythological. He creates, for instance, a mythological goddess, terrible and destructive,

One has a face burned hard
As the red Cretan clay,
Who wears a white torso scarred
With figures like a calendar.
She sits among broken shafts
Of stone; she is and still will be,
Who feeds on cities, gods, and men,
Weapons of bronze and curious ornaments,
Reckoning the evens as the odds.
Her least movement recalls the sea.

He creates a road, on which a lonely man is walking, and the strange, luminous perspective recalls the utter, lovely loneliness of the paintings of Yves Tanguy.

I see a road sunned with white sand
Wide plains surrounding silence. And

Far-off, a broken colonnade
That overthrows the sun with shade . . .

I see a road, Beyond nowhere
Defined by cirrus and blue air.

I saw a man but he is gone
His shadow gone into the sun.

His poems are a set of wonderful attempts to embody something, and, if in the end we must decide that he is a minor poet in comparison with Yeats, Eliot, or Pound, that is not to say that his gift is anything less than theirs; it is that a certain final transparency is lacking, his poems are shining but opaque or only darkly translucent objects, we are in darkness to the end, and we feel he is in darkness, about what is being embodied. He seems to have no religion, no politics, no philosophy; he feels sad and loves the beautiful. His poems, perfectly constructed as they are, seem to grow inwards into their own shape, not to reach outwards. He makes all the gestures of the most perfect communication, but in the end a poem by him seems to communicate merely itself. Perhaps there was some failure of will in him, or perhaps a peculiar scrupulosity of mind that limited the possibility of any general assent. Or perhaps he was merely a perfect artist, with the narrow concentration that makes a limited perfection possible, and born, ironically, into a time that demands more, and less, than perfection from the artist . . .

An older American poet, Wallace Stevens (born in 1879 in Pennsylvania, he went to Harvard, and is now vice-president of an insurance company in Connecticut) is much more philosophical, but in a difficult way, as if much of his thought were a series of learned footnotes to books which the reader has not in his possession. His poetry is very largely a kind of philosophical disquisition *about* poetry; about how this peculiar use of language stands in relation to the rest of reality. He has a sense that it is a peculiar use of language, that in writing a poem he is doing something odd: his poems, which are often very long, are attempts to reassure the reader and himself about what he is doing. In a long poem, called "Repetitions of a Young Captain," he says

If these were only words that I am speaking
Indifferent sounds and not the heraldic-ho
Of the clear sovereign that is reality,

Of the clearest reality that is sovereign,
How should I repeat them, keep repeating them
As if they were desperate with a know-and-how,

Central responses to a central fear,
The adobe of the angels?

(One wonders whether this is a misprint and it should be the "abode of the angels." Adobe is a sort of sun-dried clay, made into little bricks, out of which Latin Americans build their ranchos. He may mean that words are at once very natural, and yet artificial, too, like these little bricks, and that we arrive at our most profound intuitions of reality—he will have Maritain's intuitive angels in mind—by playing about, in an innocent fashion, with words). He goes on, in this poem, justifying himself,

On a few words of what is real in the world
I nourish myself. I defend myself against
Whatever remains . . .

and he sees the soldier, the rather stylized and fictitious soldier, about whom he is writing, and the poet, as engaged in creating reality, reality that becomes real for us when, and only when, it is properly stated in words:

A few words of what is real or may be

Or of glistening reference to what is real,
The universe that supplements the manqué,
The soldier seeking his point between the two,

The organic consolation, the complete
Society of the spirit when it is
Alone, the half-arc hanging in mid-air,

Comprised, appropriate to the incomplete,
Supported by a half-arc in mid-earth.
Millions of instances of which I am one,

and he sees language, also (if I interpret these difficult lines correctly) as a sort of magic which can enable us, if we can state reality properly, to avoid such unstated half-realities as the damaging experience of war. His attitude to language is almost a religious one:

Discover
A civil nakedness in which to be,

In which to bear with the exactest force
The precisions of fate, nothing fobbed off, nor changed
In a beau language without a drop of blood.

Stevens, not much known in this country, though Nicholas Moore and Julian Symons have written about him, is a great influence in his own

country. This peculiarly self-conscious approach to language, to composition, to what exactly one is doing when one is writing a poem, is common among the Americans, but rare (except in the case of a poet like Mr. Empson, who happens also to be an expert in the theory of language) over here. Probably in American society, with its pressures towards average behaviour, it does seem a much odder thing than it does over here to be actually writing a poem, and so composition must be more self-conscious. One finds that self-consciousness in two other elder poets, whom I shall mention before getting on to the younger ones, William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore. William Carlos Williams is a doctor in a small town in New Jersey, and his poems and his prose are both an attempt to look with a very fresh eye on the very ordinary life of this small town. He gets his freshness by breaking down everything into very small and precise visual details, and by breaking up his verse, too, so that it expresses all the hesitations of a voice that is hesitating because it wants to get everything just right: what is self-conscious in Williams, unlike Stevens, is a naivety, but it is *very* self-conscious, and therefore in a sense sophisticated, too. This is from a long poem he is at present writing of which the hero is the town where he works, Paterson, New Jersey: the image, built up in slow, elaborate detail, the pauses part of the main effect, is of a man walking across fields,

> he leaves the path, finds hard going
> across field, stubble, and matted brambles
> seeming a pasture—but no pasture—
> old furrows to say labour sweated or
> had sweated here
> a flame,
> spent.
>
> The file-sharp grass
> When! from before his feet, half tripping,
> picking away, there starts
> a flight of empurpled wings!
> —invisibly created (their
> jackets dust-gray) from the dust kindled
> to sudden ardor!

Such a passage may suggest something of what I meant, earlier on, by talking about the self-enclosure of Bishop's verse; his very tight, polished technique implied that self-enclosure, a bird couldn't start up, unexpectedly, from the middle of the rounded stanza. Williams has a much more hesitant, though an equally arduous technique. He gives us many common sensations back, he gives a new innocence to sensation, because he directs this kind of alert, perturbed attention upon it. Sometimes the sensations seem trivial, sometimes we get tired of the sensation of walking,

so slowly, so carefully, on tip-toe. But he is a deep and humane poet, he is trying to build up, from these innumerable small details, the whole warm structure of American life. His poetry is very much a doctor's poetry. No symptom is too trivial for his grave attention, and he is not going to make up his mind in advance about what sort of a state the patient is in.

Marianne Moore is a great technician, one of the great innovators in verse of our time. Note the form of this (for convenience, I put the rhyming syllables in italics).

They say *there* is a sweeter *air*
    where it was made, than we have *here;*
    a Hamlet's castle atmo*sphere*
at all events there is in Brooklyn
*some*thing that makes me feel at *home.*

Noone *may* see this put *away*
    museum-piece, this country *cart*
    that inner happiness made *art*:
and yet in this city of freckled
*in*tegrity it is a *vein*

of re*sined* hardness from north-*wind*
    hardened Sweden's once-opposed-*to*
    compromise archipela*go*
of rocks, Washington and Gustavus
*A*dolphus, forgive our de*cay.*

Here metre is not accentual or quantitative, but syllabic, which allows for these rhymes on unaccented syllables, and greatly enlarges the available number of rhymes in English. She is not only a technician, however, but a wit, a fantastically accurate observer, a humane and generous gentlewoman, and a person who brings into verse some of the wry precisions of the best, the most intimate conversation or the most amicable prose. She is, in a good sense, metaphysical, as in these lines about the human mind,

It tears off the veil; tears
    the temptation, the
mist the heart wears
    from its eyes,—if the heart
    has a face; it takes apart
dejection. It's fire in the dove-necks

irridescence; in the
    inconsistencies
of Scarlatti.

Unconfusion submits
its confusion to proof; it's
not a Herod's oath that cannot change.

These four poets, I think, are all living influences on young American poets in a way, for instance, that Eliot and Yeats are living influences for us. Of the younger contemporary English poets, Auden and Barker have had an important influence in America, but Dylan Thomas and Stephen Spender, for instance, not. Thomas and Spender are, in their very different ways, poets of feeling: Auden comes across to the Americans, who distrust straight poems of feeling, because he shares their wide scatter of intellectual curiosity (in return he has learned something, particularly from Miss Moore); Barker might seem a poet of feeling too, but he shares with the Americans a fascinated wish to try out new, gaudy, and glittering verbal combinations; he likes, as they do, long latinised words or technical terms used in a way rather aside from their technical sense. From the point of view of the specifically English tradition, perhaps his taste in words is at once showy and bad, but the English tradition is not a universal one, and he has very much the contemporary American taste in words. A good poet and critic who has had almost no influence over here (on myself certainly, but do I count?), William Empson, has had a strong influence in America. His kind of probing scholarship is very much to their taste. They have managed a kind of bridge between academic criticism and creative writing (many of their best young poets are university teachers) which we might be the better of over here. The appeal of poetry to the mind, or even to the self-esteem of the ordinary cultivated person, is something they are always thinking of. This makes purely lyrical writing much more difficult for them than us, but it stiffens up the logical structure of their verse. The American poet demands (as we, perhaps, also ought to demand) alertness in his reader. He jogs, he does not lull.

THE HID BATTLEMENTS

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE ENGLISH MYSTICAL AND DEVOTIONAL POETS

BY

DALLAS KENMARE

PART II

"If the Doors of Perception were cleansed," William Blake wrote, "everything would be seen as it is, infinite, but Man has closed himself up and sees only through the chinks of his own Cavern".

How are the doors to be opened? The poets of every age, and specifically the mystical and devotional poets, declare the way in every word and every line, for somehow, somewhere, at some time they have seen the doors flung wide and the light of the Kingdom of Heaven shining through. "Somehow, somewhere, at some time"—how, where, when, we cannot say, we have only the evidence of the inspired words that have been written as a result of the vision: the time and the way cannot be told in the language of what Wordsworth called "the common day". But the knowledge is there, the wisdom is there, for all to read, but not, as yet, for all to understand. The poetry Shelley was writing over a hundred and twenty years ago is scarcely understood yet, and was almost entirely unintelligible, and altogether unacceptable, to his contemporaries. As Mr. Charles Morgan wrote in a recent article on "Shelley in Italy: An Anthology":

> Leigh Hunt had seen the quality in him, Trelawny too, Byron and one or two others, but in the man more certainly than in the poet: none guessed, or came near to guessing while he lived, the dazzling place he now holds in the literature of the world.

Even so, the "dazzling place" the great poets eventually come to hold in literature does not by any means ensure that *what they are saying* will be understood. Always it is as if "poetry" and "life" remain divorced; the two levels of experience seem irreconcilable. But "What is Life?"—to echo the last words of Shelley's last, unfinished poem, "The Triumph of Life." Can we call "life" the trivial, surface existence of every day, where feeling is for the most part concealed, and even thought circumspectly trimmed and whittled down before it is allowed expression in words? No, this is only the reflection of the true life, the life that is lived within, in the "invisible world", the world the poets habitually live in, and send word of to enrich and enlighten our inadequate surface existence. Perhaps one day the surface and the depths will be brought into perfect harmony. Not until then, indeed, can there be hope of properly cleansing the Doors of Perception, and seeing clearly.

Perhaps it was because Blake was so titanic a figure, bestriding the last years of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth like a Colossus, that during the period preceding his birth no great mystical poetry was written. The world of literature was taking breath to greet this Titan. However it may be, after the death of Henry Vaughan in 1695, there was a lull until the moment when the mighty voice of William Blake, who was born sixty-two years after Vaughan's death, began to proclaim the Kingdom. The immense figure of Blake fits into no category; his poetry was neither mystical nor devotional; like the work of every colossal artist, it outspanned the bounds of narrow categories. He lived and worked alone on his Olympian heights, a lonely prophet. How might not our present calamitous situation be ameliorated if one of his dictums alone were accepted:

> "Poetry Fetter'd Fetters the Human Race. Nations are Destroyed or Flourish in proportion as their Poetry, Painting and Music are Destroyed or Flourish.

The arts, during the last fifty years especially, have been so pitifully fettered through neglect—probably the worst fetter of all—that it is small wonder that all the nations of the world hover perilously on the brink of destruction. None will listen to the voice of the poets, calling the world to unity and peace. And in one of his greatest poems, its glory not even diminished by popularity, Blake cried:

> And was the holy Lamb of God
> On England's pleasant pastures seen?
> And did the Countenance Divine
> Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
> And was Jerusalem builded here
> Among these dark, Satanic mills?

Today the dark Satanic mills grind ever more relentlessly, not only in England, but throughout the world, and where is the Countenance Divine? Can it ever shine again on hills so clouded by ignorance and fear? And though these inspired words of Blake are spoken and sung so often, who is there to heed their meaning?

Soon after Blake's birth came three more giants of poetry: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley. Though they are not usually classed as mystical and/or devotional poets, much has been written of Wordsworth's "Nature mysticism", and the mystical strain in the poetry of Coleridge and Shelley. But again, these three giants really elude categories. In the work of every great poet there must inevitably be elements of what is known as mysticism, though none of these three, unless it were perhaps Wordsworth in his more pious moments, could be called "devotional". Two excellent studies deal in detail with the relation between poetry and the life of the Spirit: the famous "Prayer and Poetry" by the Abbé Brémond, and "Mysticism and Poetry" by A. Allen Brockington. In such a brief article as this it is

scarcely possible to touch even the fringe of so vast and intricate a subject. Certainly the stanzas from "Adonais" beginning "That Light whose smile kindles the Universe" and "The One remains the many change and pass", and many passages in "Prometheus Unbound" reveal Shelley as one of the greatest of poet-mystics, and Coleridge's poetry teems with mystical suggestion.

Ten years before Shelley's untimely death, while Wordsworth and Coleridge and even Blake were still producing great poetry, Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, on May 7th, 1812. He was destined to be a great religious poet, though scarcely a mystic in the usual sense of the word, and certainly not devotional, though he sang of God with so powerful a voice, God the pervasive Spirit in all his poetry, which overflows with the immanence of the Divine.

There must necessarily be as many ways to God as there are ways of feeling, of thought, of language, and there should be no "jarring" among the "two and seventy sects", since God's way is the way of peace, of reconcilement and toleration. So comparison between the relative greatness, the relative importance of the message, of different poets is not only irrelevant and futile but paltry too. Each speaks with his own unique voice, and the real, the only final, test is sincerity, and the quality and nature of the voice. Browning's line "Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure" embodies the essence of the only "philosophy of life" that will withstand the chances and changes and perils of this mortal existence. But only one of his poems is concerned with actual mystical experience: "Christmas Eve", although "The Strange Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician" describes precisely, in the story of Lazarus, the sufferings of the mystic in the world. He has seen the vision, yet must live among men who can neither know or understand what has happened to him. "A Death in the Desert" tells the story of the last hours of St. John the Evangelist; "Bishop Blougram's Apology" is a discourse on theological issues, doctrine and faith, "Saul" and "Abt Vogler", "Rabbi ben Ezra", too, are powerful religious poems, and "The Ring and the Book" is shot through with a vivid and living religious faith. Indeed, every word Browning wrote was irradiated with that faith, to a far greater degree than his contemporary, Tennyson, who wrote of "the Power in darkness which we guess", and whose faith was a tremulous thing compared with Browning's great, over-mastering assurance of God and His goodness, and the grandeur of the plan of human life.

About the middle of the nineteenth century, three outstanding mystical and devotional poets were born: Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844), with his muscular, wrestling genius, writing such lines as

> But ah, but O thou terrible, why wouldst thou rude on me
> Thy wring-world right foot rock? lay a lion limb against
> me, scan
> With darksome devouring eyes my bruised bones?

Alice Meynell (1850), her beautiful devout voice appealing with quiet persuasion to an unheeding world, and Francis Thompson, the outcast, in many ways too like the saint whose name he shared, who had lived his life among the outcasts and the ailing, in the byways of Assisi. Thompson, while roaming the London streets, desolate and uncomforted, made great verse in his tormented mind,

> But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
> Cry; — and upon thy so sore loss
> Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
> Pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross,

dreaming that he who had already glimpsed the vision might one day see in truth

> . . . Christ walking on the water
> Not of Genesareth, but Thames!

Of Alice Meynell, who came at last to rescue him from his derelict suffering (alas, too late!), he once wrote

> Thy childhood must have felt the stings
> Of too divine o'ershadowings,

and those overshadowings made of her, and of him, the great devotional and mystical poets they were.

[*To be continued*]

PROBLEMS OF THE CONTEMPORARY POET — II

BY

PETER RUSSELL

I

Having considered in the first of these articles the problem of the poet as a member of society, let us now look at some of the problems which face him in his actual writing. There are many energetic poets writing to-day, but while there seems to be plenty of vitality and confidence, there seems also to be a certain amount of truth in the opinion recently expressed by one of the more important literary periodicals, that no good poetry will be written by the younger poets for at least ten years after the war. At the time, this harsh dictum may have appeared like sour grapes or mere highbrow superciliousness, but it was plainly a considered opinion.

We are approaching the end of a new decade, the war has been finished for nearly three years, yet many readers are still confused as to exactly what contemporary poetry "is". In 1938 it was quite possible to speak of

the "political thirties" or to describe in general terms the "twenties", but how shall we describe the "forties"? Could a new "Farewell Chorus" claim that the "forties" have shown us a "new light" as Gascoyne claimed for the "grim thirties"? Certainly W. B. Yeats' remark that there seemed to be more good minor poets writing in England than at any time since the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries seemed as true in 1945 or 1946 as in 1935 when it was written. The publication of "Eros in Dogma" in 1944 and "Deaths and Entrances" in 1946 were only the peak of the considerable achievements of the younger poets, while the emergence of T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell and Charles Williams as major poets confirmed the vitality of the older generation. The death of Charles Williams in 1944 was undoubtedly a great loss to English poetry, but the continued development of Mr. Eliot and Miss Sitwell seems certain to prolong this twentieth century flowering of English poetry for a good many years to come. On the other hand the disappointing development of the more ephemeral W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender need not much detract from the reputation of English poetry, for their contemporaries—Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNiece—have settled down to a studied competence and a poetic integrity of a high level. These four are all young men yet, and may well have better things to show in the future.

If we are confused in our idea of what contemporary poetry means for the younger poet writing to-day, it may be better to consider the whole "modern" movement from the early years of the century in full perspective and also to relate that perspective to the wider perspective of the whole history of English Literature (which I propose to write about in connection with "language" in the third article). In surveying the development of English poetry from say 1908 or 1909 to to-day we see a variety of attitudes, styles, and forms, possibly more diverse than are to be found in any other period since the 16th century. It was at this time that W. B. Yeats, approaching middle age, was rapidly changing his style and becoming what we can still to-day call a "modern" poet, that the early poems of Ezra Pound and the fruits of his subsequent collaboration with T. E. Hulme in the Imagist movement were showing the first signs of quickening what had seemed a moribund language, while the subsequent achievement of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Edith Sitwell (first published book of poetry, 1915), the brief period of creative success of Wilfrid Owen, the dynamic impact of the hitherto unknown Gerard Manley Hopkins, the new metaphysical writing of William Empson and Charles Madge, and the sparkling journalism and attractive lyricism of the political poets of the 'thirties, have all contributed to the "New Romanticism" current to-day, which is itself *directly* traceable to the work of George Barker (first published book 1933) and Dylan Thomas (first published book 1934). During the war itself the influence of these poets as well as that of the Surrealists and David Gascoyne was digested progressively more and more; the "New Apocalypse" became a movement and then disintegrated into a number

of interesting individual poets, notably G. S. Fraser and Nicholas Moore, and a number of "back-numbers" like Henry Treece, while new individualist romantic poets of more or less importance came into the public eye, notably Vernon Watkins, Alex Comfort, Keith Douglas, Sidney Keyes, John Heath-Stubbs, the three Mediterranean poets Lawrence Durrell, Bernard Spencer, and Terence Tiller, and the three Christian poets Kathleen Raine, Ann Ridler and Norman Nicholson, not to mention the interesting poets of the Scottish Renaissance and a galaxy of younger writers all of whom are of importance to-day. The persistence of *Poetry Quarterly* and the appearance of *Outposts* since 1944 as well as the new developments in *Poetry Review* not to mention the reappearance of *Poetry London* as a bi-monthly only go to prove the continuing vitality of English poetry.

On the other hand, surveying ourselves, and I speak for the youngest poets writing to-day, we see how after nearly three years of "peace", it is still impossible either to trace any definite trend or to see any new school of thought forming. The period of settling down to what we hope will be a more stable life after our years of war experience can hardly be expected to induce any certain development yet, and all we can be sure of is that the very diverse elements of the past forty years, as well as the main trends of English literature, will be consolidated into a coherent attitude and style more and more as we reach a more consistent vision and a more ordered way of life. If the present ominous political developments appear to bode little good for us, we can do little as poets but continue to consolidate the century's advances, and hope to make the most of them, whatever comes.

From a purely literary point of view the most obvious characteristic of the period is the "undigested" nature of the influences now rife. The crudest attempts to absorb an influence, as for instance Mr. Treece's lamentable pastiches of Dylan Thomas, have given way to more fragmentary styles, where one finds snippets of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, and Dylan Thomas not to mention Owen and Hopkins. As Rilke, Lorca, Neruda, Charles Williams and Montale and other important but less widely understood poets become more well known, the style of our younger and more alert writers will alter accordingly. In the meantime however there appear to be no new dynamic influences in England, and we continue our *consolidation*. Every serious poet must realise this by now, and in presumably working to digest each influence and find out all there is to be learnt, so to speak, from our immediate predecessors, whether in technique or attitudes of thought.

II

If the contemporary poet must endeavour to find out everything possible about his immediate predecessors, it must also be plain that he must in the wider sense be the "complete man". The great work of Ezra Pound

(especially "Guide to Kulchur", "A.B.C. of Reading" and of course the poems), of T. S. Eliot and of Edith Sitwell (in her anthologies as well as her poems), in determining the next "paideuma" must be both made use of and extended. The failure of some of the more erudite of our younger poets to do this is a serious sign of the times, though the work of John Heath-Stubbs in interpreting the poetry of Charles Williams, of G. S. Fraser in translating Pablo Neruda and Patrice de la Tour du Pin, and of James Kirkup (and Ross Nichols of an older generation) in "The Cosmic Shape", to take only a few instances, show that at least some work in this field is being done by the younger poets.

If we set as our ideal that extraordinary unified vision of "world-culture" which has been one of Ezra Pound's most valuable gifts to the contemporary world—in fact, if we take "all knowledge as our province" we are more likely to know not only the world we live in, but what is equally important for the poet, to know *ourselves. Nosce teipsum* is no vain motto for the poet.

We have been considering in general terms so far the questions of style and subject matter. Looking at these major problems in greater detail we come back to the two ever-present questions of the interdependence of style and subject matter, and the controversy about the respective merits of the traditional diction and the diction of the *avante-garde*. Plainly these two questions are only separate parts of the larger questions of "unity of consciousness" and complete "contemporary awareness". Style and subject matter obviously determine one another to a greater or lesser extent, and where they are ill-suited to one another, as for instance in the large numbers of so-called *sonnets* which find their way into poetry papers which are by the very nature of their subject matter no more sonnets than a chapel can be called a cathedral because a bishop happens to be speaking in it, the possibility of a poem resulting is reduced to a zero. The wider consciousness of world literature I have already spoken of, if cultivated, would minimise the possibility of such abominations either being written, or—what is less pardonable—being accepted by indulgent editors.

Only a serious study, on these lines, of literary history and the significance of its forms and styles, will produce taste and discrimination in the contemporary poet. The discriminating poet will soon come to realise how nothing save platitude can ever be expressed in a style compounded of clichés, outworn imagery and outworn cadences. That this is not understood is plain by the incidence of poetry of the most nauseating neo-Georgian quietist type which like the ill-adapted sonnet is all too commonly accepted with gusto by the less intelligent editor. The poetry of Patience Strong with a thick daub of pseudo-Hopkins, pseudo-T. S. Eliot or pseudo-Dylan Thomas, is as revolting a phenomenon as the original—probably worse.

The poet to-day, that is the younger poet, is faced with the problem of enlarging the "range of his sensibility" by careful study of both literary history and the very diverse elements present in contemporary literature.

Here I must add that *knowledge* of poetry can have little or no value if the poetry itself is not actually experienced by the reader. It is not enough to grasp intellectually the point of a poem, but realization must be a poetic experience, intellectual and emotional simultaneously. In order to realize this experience, much less to be able to build new poetry within this scaffolding, the poet must practise his art by constant exercise and imitation. Only by trying to emulate the greatness of the great can we realize that "greatness". If we want a good example of the true poet's attitude to this problem we may recall how T. S. Eliot, having shown some evidently well-written couplets to his friend Ezra Pound, eventually destroyed them after Pound had assured him of the impossibility of surpassing Pope's heroic couplets. The whole poetic career of Ezra Pound has been a constant example of this exercise and imitation of the "great", and Pound has succeeded in building up a large body of poetry of an entirely new type, on the "scaffolding" of Greek, Latin, Provençal, Italian, French and Chinese types, as well as the English. Who was to know what great things these early imitations of Browning, Yeats, the Troubadours and the early Italian poets, were to lead to? It seems quite clear that there is more to be learnt from the oeuvre of great craftsmen like Pound or Eliot, than from any number of smaller poets and literary histories. By modelling our work on various styles and seeking new syntheses we shall move towards this new style and mature expression we dream of so often. When Pound wrote in 1912 "literature is hero-worship" he knew what he was talking about!

If we must learn from the craft of words rhythms and forms of our predecessors, we must also learn all we can about their thought and the "movement" of their thought. If we compare a lyric of Donne with one by Campion for instance we find as striking a contrast as when we compare one by William Empson with one by Auden. The difference lies not in the actual words used or even the actual thoughts but in the way the thoughts "move", one after another. By becoming quite familiar with the differing methods and intentions of each poet, not only can we appreciate better all types of poetry, but we become increasingly able to enlarge our own range of expression, both in the breadth of our subject-matter and in the intensity with which it is "put over".

As the poet develops his art more and more, he naturally finds his level, not only by knowing his interests and desires—doubtless Horace would have been interested and passionately desirous of writing an epic—but also by discovering his capacity as a writer. The best poets in each genre have always realized their limitations, or when they have not, they have produced monstrosities—and monstrosities in literature suffer the most dreaded fate of all literature—oblivion, with remarkable celerity.

THE PREMIUM REPORT AND AWARD

Three poems stood out conclusively from a rather better lot of entries than usual.

John Waller's moving elegy, Elvira, has the sombre undertones of music, the fleeting shadows, the scurry of alternate dark and light, the remote, remorseless beat of the wings of time, so characteristic of his work. There is death and dissolution in the flow of that dark water surface, renewal of life in the faint lights that shiver and interlace their patterns, penetrating the black flood. It is the music of water that washes against the river piles, and quietly, insistently takes all down with it. I mean this—"In saying the music is old I mean The step was known in days before the war"—it has the true running quality, so easy, so right. This poem is a model for the seeker of new modes of music. The only thing I don't like is bringing Flecker in, which makes it less powerful to me; for the east seems more real to me in this poem than in Flecker's spiced and gaudy theatre.

"The Web," by Molly Gilbert, is a sensitive poem, delicate in its contours, sure in its apprehension, firm its touch, as a web should be if it is to hold its prey. The power of suggestion here is as good as I have seen it, nothing fails of any image to bring the jewelled spider—and so he is, most beautiful—clearer and clearer into focus. This sustained power is rare in writing and I congratulate the poet; I hope her hoard will include many lovely things and that we shall be told about them.

"At the Turn of the Year," by Geraldine Cash, is a long poem and somewhat uneven in quality, but there are so many peaks in the range that I must include it in the prize list. I allow the weakness of the quite unnecessary archaisms, the exaggerated alliterations, the over-diffuse characteristic of the whole, but there are some fine and some rare things here as well, a sustained intensity and at times a direct and simple passion.

I award the prizes as follows:—

John Waller, £4.
Molly Gilbert, £3.
Geraldine Cash, £3.

Among the highly commended, I especially liked "Elegy," by Enid Norman, a poem deep in its feeling, arresting in its simplicity, and the very successful experiment in short lines by Mrs. Gwen Kimmitt.

Highly Commended

Patricia Coursey, Cheltenham.
John Holstrom, Sheffield.
Gwen Kimmitt, Hinderwell.

Enid Norman, Weston-super-Mare.
Rosamond Reinhardt, New York.
John Rolf, Twickenham.
The Rev. J. P. Stevenson, Austria.

Commended

Shackleton Bailey, Garstang.
J. S. Blandford, Tunbridge Wells.
Mary Savidge, Bury St. Edmunds.

Will entrants please note that in future an entrance fee of 2s. 6d. is required from them?

T. W. Ramsey.

ELVIRA

(Baghdad, Autumn, 1945)

To an old music I lie in bed
And the young are gay while I
Like Proust mourning a lost Albertine—
Though am myself the captive—try
Not to be homesick nor even mourn
Cairo and a lost lovely head
Three years ago now; such memories
Are like Elvira yesterday, expensive
But fleeting, as lights on the Tigris
That tomorrow no longer live.

Flecker wrote of this city, told
Of great haunted gardens, ghosts
Splendid with love, or if they lived
Delicious Yasmins one could hold
With bribes or rich boasts.
Rafi and Pervaneh loved
Once in these streets, they
Vanished in the end like a day
One could never tire of dreaming.
Ishak and Hassan at last
Began their regular quiet roving
Through sands to Samarkand,
Leaving this tinselled past
For more certain land.

In saying the music is old I mean
The step was known in days before the war
And Cairo danced it just before Alamein.

O lights along the Nile or Tigris
Somehow one is always here before,
Before the time or after and must miss
The moment when most wanted, yet
There is no hope of reaching beyond this,
No marvel coming through the door of jet:
Our absence is the hour's maliciousness.

A day ago I nearly fell in love
With one who wanted dinars not a poem,
Cyprus in her blood, the Greek
Way of easy life and rhyme
Along limbs easy, so I speak
Of others in the past who sometimes rove
Across my heart—O jealous past
Forever chasing present until lost
Among bright thorns. The first ghost
Sleeps brilliant in Oxford where the years
Lie brave in keeping. The next is lost
With shy pose among soldiers till
Aldershot vanishes and the long
Journey begins. Perhaps most tears
Are shed for you whose song
Gay Cairo in a haunting moment sings
Amid all other legends of the night
That she can never keep. Then after exile
My last with effortless enchantment brings
New ways of innocence and wit.

Elvira now I dedicate to you
An evening's dance with fast, fair-weather smile—
Your only memory, where the drink
Was bad and dear. You were the mile
That set us coursing. You might think
Janet the plump more splendid, well
She was a Flecker image too,
But Janets and Elviras someday will
Pass to the shadows where the old
Lie loneliest upon a broken world.
There comes an hour when celebration ends
And dancing dies, the music less and less
Seems lively. You may sense
By words and talking how
A party fades and I say even this
Brings closer your own loss, for now

No memory lurks upon a present tense
But from the past plucks the unlucky finds.

Among the lost I dreamt again of you
This afternoon, meeting again
In Oxford, Cairo, Baghdad, where you will.
I said: "That time was luckless then
But you were lucky to escape this rain
Of dying memories. You were the bold
Who lured a new surrender and your loves
Made bright occasions." Softly you replied:
"That love you have belongs to only you
Who feel it, but growing old you still
May not elude it." So now I hold
To other histories, other hearts and lives,
Just as the artist tells how beauty died
And in awaking never dreams again.

The dance is finished—I can feel it now
In Baghdad lying empty by the flow
Of tired Tigris. If there was a real
Occasion left I'd know it by an end
That I felt real, but now alas
The young, the bright, the loves have fallen all
To time's invasion in a kind of blaze.
Then comes the ultimate returning friend
With sallow cheeks, dull eyes, and this
Last message saying that the campaign days
Are now quite over and unlucky love
Is left a cold star on a cheerless night
That will not light our passage as we rove
Through darkness to a greater, fairer light.

JOHN WALLER.

THE WEB

I sit, like a gravely-delicate jewelled spider,
within the centre of my web, sensitive
to every wind's breath, fleece of dandelion,
or powder-petalled rose that catches
or but tips a thread and is blown free again.
But any tremor that I feel is never caused
by any things as simply beautiful as these; unseen,
dusts eyes' quick interest upon the edge,
flurry of argument, desire's unconfessing warmth.

I gather impressions within my inward smile,
like the curved mouth of an enigmatic goddess,
and savour them and all their close-linked meanings,
brooding on them as the craftsman does
upon the detail that will make his work.
Threads reach in to me from every one I know,
some as insensitive as fastened to a stone,
others as vibrantly-alive as briar-tagged or blown.
But I wait gravely, with a child's quiet patience,
or feel a touch and go out softly to investigate,
and what is worth my while I bring back to my hoard.

There will some day pass by a wind
that shall sweep, with an ungentle but unknowing hand,
the mystery and magic of my web unto the ground.
I shall not build again, as does the spider,
nor will my unused store be anything but dust.
Uncentred, the countless threads will break and drift,
and light will die from them that once they held.
It will not matter. I am happy now,
playing my half-amused, half-serious game,
gathering to my heart's sensation the fragile threads
that will create, in time, the pattern of my life.

MOLLY GILBERT.

AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR

Body contrasteth her strength and her weakness:

"I am a door that opens on strange dreams,
Dreams that retrace lost legend to the source,
Dreams of men stronger than their times; girls beauteous
As seers' imaginings. Dreams that would sound
The unplumbed deeps of space, link star to star,
People the nebulae and bridge this universe
To vaster worlds without the bounds of Death.
Dreams that slip off Time's manacle, the second's grasp,
And spend an aeon at the Milky Way
More lightly than a lover a kiss-span.

Mine such an ardour as would melt a moon
More speedily than that last Ptolemy
Dissolved her mighty pearl, laughing to see
Rose, azure, ivory, inked-out in wine.
All this my hidden wealth I know.

I am a door in Mind's remote domain
Hung on the hinge of Fancy, to disclose
Imagination moving fearlessly
Upon dark waters of Desire's deep lake.

My hidden weakness this I know.
What would I show were I wide open swung?
Will none now plunge the key into my lock
And turn the waiting wards, and open me?"

Swiftly the Soul makes answer:

"Love is the key that sets all dreaming free,
Love is the power that gives all longing life.
Love has a song for the wind-wrung wood,
For the sunless season of sunken sap,
For the frost-blackened bud in her agony,
For all vanquished hope and all worthless weeping:
For the fragile, the feeble the new-moon-frail.

Love lends to dreams that energy the tide
Has when she trembles glaucous on the turn,
Rearing her weight of waters to advance
Once more upon the shore, or to withdraw
Backward again to ocean's tideless deep.
This is Love's gift to dreaming. Potency.
This is Love's dower. Daring. Dark witchery.
Receive the key, Love's wild swift sesame."

But the Body doubteth: she groweth old.

"Heavy am I with the grief of my hope unrewarded,
Heavy, anhungered, and hasting to be spent,
And glad with the brittle gladness of glass in splinters
For the dulling locks and the dimming eyes and the lips
A-quiver; glad for the sunless days and the nights
Bare of stars; frost's fingers lethal about growth's heart.
Heavy am I with my grief and in haste to depart:
To be one with days fled and faith dead and the years' false promises
Heavy am I now and hopeless, in haste to depart."

And now Soul in a song exhorts her:

"Rather be glad for the seed warm under snow.
For the frozen river thawing sure and slow.
For the curtained pane and the firelight glow,

And the heart unshaken though blizzards blow.
For the proven faith and the trusted shoulder.
The smile undimmed, though the mouth be older,
The glance less brilliant though no whit colder,
The blood less clamorous, the mind grown bolder.

Think, if beech and elm wore their April splendour
How dank were this garden wherein we wander,
And mourn no more for the years young and tender,
Time past and dear. Spring lies slumbering yonder.
Good is the winter of world and of lover:
The lark has one music, another the plover,
And each has his singing-time's season, remember.
Flame's self must be born from an ember, a spark . . ."

But Body grieves, beyond comforting:

"All our young hope was but a cooling ember
That lit with flickering rose Life's avid dark!"

Then to rouse her Soul argueth still:

"Hope? with less vigour than the ember knows
Among the ashes of a dying fire?
Blow on the coals till white the cherry glows
And send the sparks up, higher, higher, higher!"

And grievously Body lamenteth:

"Hearthless I go now, and headlong am driven
Homeless in all human hearts; lacking food and fire
Over a wind-worried moorland I hurry: am torn
And stung by the brambles and gorse, and the bracken blades slash at me
Hurrying through. Oh the stars of my youth are burnt out."

And Soul for the last time imploreth her:

"Hunt through the gorse then, for Love's holy face,
And warm the dark hollows with perfume and prayer.
Will you stretch out your hand for the gay yellow flower?
Will you risk the kiss for the guerdon of grace?
Through the gorse of grief hunt the Holy Face?"

And impassioned now, Body exulteth:

"With that Flower in my hand, with that Kiss on my mouth
I am armoured forever from cold and from drouth.

Now Soul, I will go with you, down dale, uphill,
Fainting and falling and failing, yet still
Rising up with the day, lying down with the sun,
With their loyalty true, their humility one,
And through bramble and gorse seek for Love's Holy Face.
See, I risk the kiss. Grant the guerdon of grace!"

GERALDINE KALKA CASH.

THE HOLMES COMPETITION FOR POEMS OF PLACE

REPORT AND AWARD

Whilst reading the entries for the 1948 Poems of Place Competition, I was strongly reminded of the young student who, on finding in his examination paper a question which he was unable to answer, wrote: "I know nothing about Malthus or his theories. I will, therefore, proceed to deal with a subject on which I have some information—Now the best way to build a rabbit-hutch . . ." Although this aberration has been emphasised in previous reports on the Holmes Competition, several contestants again ignored the principal condition that the entries should be poems *of place*. By no stretch of the imagination could *Sky-Writing, Palm Sunday, World's Heartbeat, Winter Vision* or *The Lodestone* be classified as such, and many of the others were so general in the approach or so vague in their content as to be applicable to almost any place.

To judge by the remarkably low standard of the work submitted, it would seem either that the Competition does not receive the serious attention it deserves, or that poets are no longer moved by the sight and memory of a particular scene or locality. I can hardly believe the latter to be true at a time when there are so many indications of a revival and a revitalization of local culture. Less than 5 per cent. of the submissions were worth consideration, and of these few could be regarded as poems of outstanding quality. I have seen more striking contributions in the odd corners of those popular magazines which make no pretence of publishing first-class poetry. For this reason I am unable to adopt the usual practice of appending a list of *Highly Commended* or even *Commended* entrants.

All the worst defects were in evidence—flatness, pedestrianism, false sentimentality, lack of rhythm or craftsmanship, facile and graceless construction, overstatement, affectation, clichés, feeble repetition, and alliteration used in such a manner as to suggest the beating of a huge

drum. Shakespeare was the favourite authority; and if it was not exactly "this precious stone, set in the silver sea" it was gems, sapphires, rubies, diamonds and numerous other stones set, shaped, hidden, wrapped or enveloped in something equally derivative and slipped out of the bargain-basement of *Richard II.*

Amongst those from which the final choice was made were Joan E. Swift's charming and unpretentious *The Loveliest Town I Know,* and E. N. Jones' *Two Seas* with its unusual but well-developed theme. *Milan Cathedral,* a long poem by Peter Russell, was impressive for its originality and its co-ordination of the past with contemporary events:

> "Here on a star, a cathedral roof or the watch-tower
> Of history I stand perplexed.
> No-one to tempt,
> No urge to be cast down.
> All Milan spread out beneath my feet."

The prospect was a little too much for Mr. Russell, for he was unable to sustain the quality throughout the poem and he "descends into the city" on a very weak note indeed. His historical and literary allusions would entail a whole page of explanations. Joan Quayle's *At the Roman Villa, Chedworth,* "little smile behind the hand of time," contained some effective lines and pleased me by the freshness of its style. Equally pleasing was the skilfully contrived sonnet-sequence, *The Acropolis of Appollo,* by John Wheatley, though it could hardly be described as a poem of place. Of the two poems entered by John Bayliss, the nostalgic *Chiswick House* succeeded in recapturing the atmosphere of a bygone age.

To Peter Russell I award the first prize of £7 for his poem *Florence* which possesses depth and emotional power from the first line to the last. *Yŏloshán* wins the second prize of £3 for John Blanford. This poem recreates all the fascination and colour as well as the "squalor, turmoil, sweat and stink" of the typical Chinese scene. No other poem has sufficient merit to warrant a third award. In my task of adjudication I have attempted to maintain the highest critical standards and I sincerely hope that, far from discouraging the contestants for future competitions, my comments will serve to remind them of their responsibilities to their work and to themselves as poets.

HOWARD SERGEANT.

FLORENCE

(Lines for Arnolfo Ferruolo)

> Open the window . . . arms on the dusty sill . . .
> And a deep breath of the motionless sun-shot air.
> What do I see? The unridged sky, and
> Across a hundred crooked rooftops westwards

Giotto's tower:—Tears in the eye, tears
Torn from the seeing eye and living memory.
Here Dante, here Cino, here Cavalcanti,
Petrarca—and the centuries of rebirth, creation, death
Gloriously achieved. Here too the mean street-
Fights, brawls and intrigues of the proud. Here . . .
Angelico the blessed painting in San Marco . . . Fra
Girolamo burning in the market-place—agora—piazza
Signoria—what matter the name? . . . here . . . tears
Tyrants O tears protect these eyes from the hot
Florentine sun . . . glittering ancient rooftops,
Towers of the extinct and belfries of the past.

Open the eyes . . . the tears are dust . . . here
Noon of an August day on the fifth floor
Under the eaves immensely broad and the talkative
Nesting bird—the tears and the dust are dry.
I rest my arms on the dusty sill and my eyes
Turn Northwards to Fiesole, and the trams thunder
Unseen in the streets below, inevitable unwanted
Noisy and necessary guests in a city of ghosts.
Elizabeth Barrett, Arthur Hugh Clough, W. S. Landor
Lie in the English cemetery, ghosts of our own
In the warm turf tufted with cypresses;—and
The trams clatter by—they are closing the shops
For the afternoon. Is this a silence or an unheard
Rumbling of innumerable unseen encounters
In the world below? Not a sound or a ripple disturbs
The utterly still air silent up here.

Open and close the eyes—dry the tears—
Open the eyes again—and another breath,
Another look over the rooftops wondering
Where the leading leads and what the roofing
Hides. Over the rooftops Giotto's tower,
Innumerable towers and belfries level or higher
Than the glittering rooftops—tears will be dry and always
Incessant trams rounding the English Cemetery.

PETER RUSSELL.

YÓLOSHÁN

On Yóloshán the breezes pass,
The wind-waves sweep across the grass . . .
"Hodie mihi, tibi cras"—
Today is mine on Yóloshán:
For I am free to roam at will
On Yóloshán, the sacred hill,
Heart of a land where Time stands still,
The realm of old Hunán.

The city swelters in the heat
But here, where hill and heaven meet,
The upland air is cool and sweet,
The sun's benevolent and kind.
How distant seems the human hive
Where hapless helots sweat and strive!
How near seems heaven to the live
Awareness of the mind!

Siáng, the life-stream of Hunán,
Runs north-away past Yóloshán,
Through Túngting Lake at Lólintán
And Yangtse-wards where Yóchów stands:
From sandy shore and river-bar—
Below the hill, extending far—
Derives the name of grey Chángshá,
The City of Long Sands.

When summer melts Tibetan snows
The swollen Yangtse overflows,
It drowns the rice-lands as it goes
And makes the Túngting Lake a sea
Full fifty miles across and more,
That was a creek-cleft marsh before:
Clean off the map, past sight of shore,
The junks go sailing free.

As Túngting fills, Siáng's denied
The normal outlet for its tide,
It falters, sand and silt subside,
And like a clear lagoon it gleams,
With turquoise borrowed from the sky
And cloud reflections floating by . . .
A marvel to the Chinese eye
Inured to turbid streams.

Chángshá . . . it seems an age ago,
I sailed there on the old *Chàngwò,*
That plodding, stern-wheeled curio
With two fierce eyes upon her bow!
(Built for the Mississippi trade
Fifty years back, the Master said
Her shallow draft and stern-wheel made
Her wallow like a sow!).

And there I saw two summers fly
Like thistledown across the sky,
Like faint cloud-shadows drifting by
Over the grass on Yóloshán.
We youngsters were a carefree throng,
Who worked then in the Chángshá hong;
Our home the Island, three miles long
And scarce a furlong's span.

The river, flowing past our doors,
Was Hunán's highway; junks in scores,
Squat sampans sculled by stern-rigged oars
Like water-beetles scurrying:
Gay house-flag forrard, ensign aft,
Sleek launches slipped past slower craft;
Lumbering lighter, timber-raft,
Bore down unhurrying.

While, moored along the city bank
Between the hulks, lay, rank on rank,
A floating slum, that swarmed and stank
Of wood-oil, garlic, fish a-drying:
Those blazing, humid, sweating noons!
Stevedores, godowns, packed pontoons . . .
The coolies chant . . . a junk-wife croons
To hush her baby's crying.

Day-long, we worked upon the brink
Of squalor, turmoil, sweat and stink.
In front, the Bund, the coolie-swink:
Behind, the seething city hummed
And festered like a steaming midden,
Where bred a noisome life and hidden
In alley refuse, fever-ridden,
And pools putrescent-scummed.

How often in the sultry day
My truant thoughts would steal away
From ledger, invoice, desk . . . to play
On Yóloshán, the green and cool:
And when the laggard clock restored
Our freedom and we leaped on board
The waiting launch, our spirits soared
Like lads released from school.

And then, until the daylight died,
Came swimming, tennis or a ride:
The workaday was cast aside,
We drank and dallied with a zest.
But chiefly it was my delight
To climb the sun-detaining height
Of Yóloshán, and watch the flight
Of day toward the West.

Long hours thereon I loved to spend
When the week's work was at an end,
Till Yóloshán became a friend,
I won the féngshui gods' goodwill:
And in their high and holy place
Mid crags unmarred by human trace
They gave me, as a mark of grace,
The freedom of the hill.

And though a quarter-century
Since then has had its sport with me
And Time's sands, ebbing rapidly,
Have buried those days far below;
Yet sometimes in my dreams I can
Evade his harsh tyrannic ban,
And slip away to Yóloshán
As I did long ago . . .

Oh, still the singing breezes pass,
The wind-waves sweep across the grass . . .
"Hodie mihi, tibi cras" . . .
Their theme's unchanged on Yóloshán:
And once again I roam at will
On Yóloshán, the sacred hill,
Heart of the land where Time stands still,
The kingdom of Hunán.

JOHN BLANFORD.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Poetry Society's Auditions and Examinations

The Poetry Society has conducted auditions and examinations in the art of verse-speaking for many years, and its success in this valuable cultural activity is attested by the fact that the number of schools and institutions in all parts of England which the Society examines continually increases.

Junior preliminary examinations are available for the youngest children and these continue through various grades, up to the last test for adult students, for which the Society's gold medal is the final award for success.

General regulations governing these auditions have recently been revised. Copies may be obtained on application to The Registrar, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1, with whom arrangements can be made for auditions for schools, colleges or private individuals. Applications for audition dates should be made as long as possible beforehand.

The following is the list of Gold Medal examiners for the Poetry Society:—Miss Peggy Ashcroft, Mr. W. G. Bebbington, Lady Buckmaster, Mr. John Chandos, Mr. Patric Dickinson, Mr. Alec Guinness, Mr. John Holgate, Miss Margaret Rutherford, Lady Margaret Sackville, The Hon. V. Sackville West, Mr. Clive Sansom, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Mr. Donald Wolfitt, Mr. George Wood.

The list of regular examiners for the Poetry Society is as follows:—Miss Ann Clark, Miss Mary Cole, Miss Lesley Crease, Miss Jean Hamilton, Miss Mollie Hudson, Miss Dorothy Robinson, Miss Roberta Shuttleworth, Miss Kathleen Stone.

The Liverpool Centre of the Poetry Society

A centre of the Poetry Society has been formed in Liverpool, and will meet regularly at the premises of Messrs. Rushworth & Dreaper, 11-17 Islington Liverpool 3, who have kindly consented to the use of their music room. The President of the Centre is Mr. Howard Sergeant.

The following readings have been arranged to the end of the year: 30th September, J. Barron Mays, B.A., "The Poetic Art of Richard Crashaw"; 28th October, Professor L. C. Martin, M.A., B.Litt. (Professor of English, Liverpool University), "The Making of Poetry"; 25th November, J. Redwood Anderson, "Pillars to Remembrance"; 30th December, Members' Verse Writing Competition.

Meetings are held at 6.30 p.m. on the above dates at Messrs. Rushworth & Dreaper, 11-17 Islington, Liverpool, 3.

All enquiries should be addressed to Mrs. Lallie Roberts, Hon. Secretary, 89 Bowring Park Avenue, Liverpool 16.

A Special Prize for Spoken English

To be awarded annually to selected children from schools in Chelsea and Kensington

The object of this prize is to encourage the appreciation of poetry amongst London school children, and promote a good standard of spoken English. The prize is to consist of a Book selected by the President and Committee of the Chelsea Poetry Circle.

For further particulars of the above Competition please apply to John E. Carroll Hon. Secretary, 5 Redesdale Street, Chelsea, S.W.3.

The Buckinghamshire Centre of the Poetry Society

Programme, 1948

Reading by members—unless otherwise stated—at the following addresses:—

September 11th at 3 p.m. Animals. Miss E. D. Bangay, Tilehurst Cottage, Hemel Hempstead Road, Chesham.

October 9th at 3 p.m. Cathleen Nesbitt reading poems of her own selection. St. Bernard's Convent, High Wycombe. This meeting is open to the public.

November 13th at 2.45 p.m. Shakespeare's Cymbeline. Mrs. E. Van den Bergh, Beacon View, Penn.

December 11th at 3 p.m. Members' own choice of poems by living authors. British Legion, Tylers Green.

Miss E. Bangay and Mr. H. K. Grant have been elected Vice-Presidents of the Poetry Society in recognition of their valuable services.

Arnold Vincent Bowen Society
(Affiliated to the Poetry Society)

An Arnold Vincent Bowen Society has been formed which will meet at 30 Curzon Road, Birkenhead, on Sunday evenings at 8.15 p.m.

Membership is open to all who shared with Arnold Vincent Bowen an enthusiasm for fellowship in music and poetry, and to their friends. Members will be asked to discuss work read at the meetings, to contribute items for discussion gathered from their own reading, and to contribute original work if they so desire.

The Society will be affiliated to the Poetry Society and to the Saturdays Poetry writing club, of which Arnold Vincent Bowen was one of our founder members in 1944.

Poetry Society Junior Competition for Verse Writing

Plans are in preparation for an annual award to be offered by The Poetry Society for verse writing amongst school children. Further particulars will be available in the next number of The Poetry Review.

Romford Poetry—an anthology of poems by members of the Romford Centre of the Poetry Society, price 2s.—is obtainable from T. Astore, 13 Faircross Avenue, Romford, Essex.

The offices of the Poetry Society at 33 Portman Square will be closed during the month of August.

The Poetry Hours at 33 Portman Square will be discontinued during the months of August and September.

The Greenwood Anthology of New Verse, Edited by Herbert Palmer (price 7s. 6d.) published by Frederick Muller, contains poems entered for the Greenwood Competition in 1943, when the judge was Herbert Palmer. Through lack of paper many good poems were not published in The Poetry Review, and so it was decided by Mr. Palmer to compile an anthology, containing poems by T. W. Ramsey, Howard Sergeant, Herbert Corby, H. W. Harding, Arthur Ball, Wrenne Jarman, Edward Vandermere Fleming, Phyllis Lyth and many others. It is hoped that this anthology will receive support. Orders should be placed at book shops.

It has been suggested by some members of the Poetry Society that a presentation fund be started on the occasion of the retirement of Mr. Galloway Kyle, formerly Director of the Poetry Society and Editor of this journal. The following subscribers to the fund are acknowledged:—

Mr. Howard Parsons; Mr. P. E. Leaver; Miss Rose Fee; Miss Ivy Smithson; Miss Nell Farleigh; Miss Curle; Mrs. Lucy Bredin; Miss Vassie; Mr. Creasey; Dr. Sackville Martin; Miss Bangay; Mr. Shorthose; Dr. J. Douglas Webster; Miss R. Shuttleworth; Mrs. T. L. Adamson; Mr. T. W. Ramsey; Mr. Hedley Lucas; Mrs. Cohen; Miss R. Cohen; Mr. A. S. Swinhoe; Mrs. F. L. Jones; Miss I. Bell; Mr. Robert Walker; Miss R. McKie; Miss F. Bradford; Mr. Denis Turner; Mrs. B. G.

Brooks; Miss Beatrice Rose; Mrs. Kathleen Lack; Miss Gordon Smythies; Mrs. M. A. Richards; Mr. M. E. Mason; Miss R. C. Thomas; The Marist Sisters; Miss M. E. Riley; Miss Bristowe; Miss U. M. Pye; Mrs. A. Hughes; Miss E. Dobell; Miss A. Balthazar; Mr. W. K. Seymour; Mrs. E. A. Jameson; Mr. J. E. Mullins; Miss I. Ormsby; Mrs. C. H. Phillips; Miss V. Baillieu; Miss Rita Milner; Miss E. M. Cattell; Mr. W. Walker; Miss D. A. Parr; Miss F. E. Pritchard; Miss W. Atkins; Miss B. Watson; Mr. R. Barton; Miss M. King; Mrs. Stoke Roberts; Mrs. Nita Padwick.

Will members who would like to contribute to the fund please communicate with the General Secretary, The Poetry Society, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1.

Submissions to the Editor

Manuscripts may be submitted to the Editor, The Poetry Review, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1, for consideration in the ordinary way apart from entries for competitions. Such MSS. should be typewritten, or if this is impossible, printed legibly, and if their return is desired should be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope. The Editor can accept no responsibility for the safety of MSS. although every care will be taken to ensure this. Acceptance will not imply immediate publication; payment will be made upon publication.

The Love Lyric Competition for 1948

This annual competition offers £10 for an original love lyric. Competitors must observe the following rules:

1. Not more than two poems may be entered by each competitor.
2. The length of an entry must not exceed thirty lines.
3. Entries must be typewritten, bear the name and address of the author and be addressed "Love Lyric Competition".
4. The Competition will close on 31st December, 1948.
5. The Editor reserves the right to publish any poem submitted, in The Poetry Review, but without prejudice to the author's right of publication elsewhere later.
6. Competitors must be members of the Poetry Society.
7. If competitors wish their entries returned will they please enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

The Premium Competition

The above competition continues as before with the offer of £10 in prize money which may be won outright by a single competitor or may

be divided at the discretion of the Premium Adjudicator. It has been found necessary to charge an entrance fee of 2s. 6d., and a stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed if a receipt is desired. Competitors must observe the following rules:

1. One poem only may be entered by each competitor.
2. The poem must be typed and no stamped and addressed envelope will be required unless a receipt is desired. See Rule 3.
3. Competitors must retain copies of their poems, as none can be returned.
4. Entries must be addressed "Premium Competition", THE POETRY REVIEW, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1.
5. Each poem must bear the author's name and address and the words "For Premium Competition".
6. Entrants must be members of the Poetry Society or regular subscribers to THE POETRY REVIEW.
7. The winner of a full Premium or one who has shared the prize twice will not be eligible for re-entry for twelve months.

The closing date for the next Premium Competition will be September 1st.

A SCOTS POETRY COMPETITION

Mr. William Hutcheson, C.E., one of the soldier poets of the 17th Highland Light Infantry in the 1914-18 war, who subsequently published a collection of modern Scots verse, Chota Chants, has provided us with three consecutive premiums of £5 each for the encouragement and recognition of Scots poets of to-day. The third £5 is now on offer for poems addressed "Doric, The Poetry Society, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1", and received not later than November 1st, 1948. There should be not more than two entries from each competitor. Archaic and abstruse words should be avoided; if a stiff Doric term is used, it should be essential and virile and easily understood from the context. The poems should have a Scots flavour.

THE POETRY SOCIETY'S CRITICAL SERVICE

This service continues to grow in popularity but it has been found necessary to amend slightly the terms upon which it is available to members. A minimum fee of 5s. will be charged in future and two poems only may be submitted for this sum. Additional poems will cost 2s. each for criticism and it is particularly requested that all poems submitted should be typed as this is as much in the author's interest as in the critic's.

The Greenwood Prize for 1948

The Poetry Society is empowered by the executors of the late Mrs. Julia Wickham Greenwood to offer the sum of £20 as the Shirley Carter Greenwood Prize for 1949 for the best single poem in open competition. Entries should be addressed "The Greenwood Prize", 33 Portman Square, London, W.1, and must be received before July 31st. Only one poem may be submitted by any one competitor, the length not to exceed 250 lines; no previously published poem may be entered. The full name and address of the author must be given and a stamped addressed envelope enclosed. (If a *non-de-plume* is adopted, name and address of sender must be given in a closed envelope bearing the pseudonym.) The winning poem will be printed in The Poetry Review and may be reprinted at the discretion of the Editor, who may reserve near winners for publication in The Poetry Review.

The Annual General Meeting of the Poetry Society was held at 33 Portman Square, London, W.1, on Wednesday, May 12th, 1948, at 3.30 p.m. Mr. T. W. Ramsey, then Chairman of the Council, took the Chair.

The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting were read by the Secretary and approved by the meeting.

The Chairman read a report on the work of the Society during the year, confirming that the three aims of the Society

(a) to encourage the making of poetry
(b) to encourage the speaking of poetry
(c) to encourage the appreciation of poetry

had been pursued and enlarged during the past year, progress having been made in each direction. The Chairman added that he was particularly pleased to welcome the support given to the Society by many of the leading contemporary poets. The Chairman was pleased to report that two new Centres had been formed, one in Chelsea and the other in Liverpool, and were now flourishing, and that the formation of other centres was in progress. Many letters of appreciation on the new format and policy of Poetry Review had been received.

The Chairman called upon Mr. John Bayliss to read the motion of which he had given notice.

Mr. William Kean Seymour intervened with the request that the Financial Statement should come next on the agenda and this was put to the vote and agreed.

The Treasurer read his report on the financial position of the Society and formally presented the statement of accounts to December, 1947. The Treasurer said that he, personally, regarded the position as being quite healthy but that for the benefit of the meeting he had asked the Auditors to make a formal report. The auditors' report was then read.

Dr. Marie Stopes and Mr. Robert Armstrong asked questions on the figures shown in the Balance Sheet, which the Treasurer answered satisfactorily.

Mr. Howard Sergeant then said that he objected to the business of the meeting being held up for the Balance Sheet, and he found nothing unfavourable in the accounts. Poets were now being paid for their work and the size of *Poetry Review* had increased. He moved that the accounts be adopted.

Mr. W. K. Seymour again expressed dissatisfaction, and was opposed by Mr. Tambimuttu, Mr. John Waller, Mr. Hugo Manning and Mr. Vivian Burbury, who seconded Mr. Sergeant's proposal and the accounts were adopted by the meeting.

The Chairman then asked Mr. Bayliss to speak on his motion, and this was opposed by Dr. Leigh Henry who pointed out that his motion should come first. Mr. Vivian Burbury pointed out that there was also a motion to come forward in his name, in opposition to Dr. Leigh Henry's, but that the motions must be taken in some order.

The Chairman then asked Mr. Bayliss to resume. Mr. Bayliss spoke in favour of the present policy of the Society and remarked that the reputation of the Society had improved enormously. Correspondence was now acknowledged, and poets were paid for their work. The aims of the Society, he said, were right. He moved a vote of confidence in the present Council.

Dr. Leigh Henry again moved that this should be taken after his own. This was carried.

Dr. Leigh Henry then read a motion to the effect that a Committee of Enquiry be appointed for the purpose of examining the causes of the resignations from the Council of the Poetry Society, of the President and other members, with a view to finding whether the interests of the Society were prejudiced by these resignations. Dr. Leigh Henry said that it was in the interests of everybody that a committee of enquiry should be set up.

Many speeches in favour and against an enquiry were made.

The Chairman made a statement explaining that the reason for the resignations was a dispute between the present Secretary and former Chairman. The Council had given full consideration to the matter and he thought they had acted justly.

A vote was taken on Dr. Leigh Henry's motion, and it was defeated.

Dr. Marie Stopes and a number of other members then demanded a poll on the question of an enquiry, and as the necessary ten members supported this demand a poll was accepted by the Chairman. (The result of the poll is printed on p. 316.)

The Chairman then read the nominations to the General Council, all of whom were elected.

Mrs. T. L. Adamson moved a vote of thanks to the Chairman and Treasurer, and this was carried.

To the Chairman of the General Council,
The Poetry Society (Incorporated),
33 Portman Square, London, W.1.

Dear Sir,

Poll concerning Appointment of Committee of Enquiry

As requested by the Honorary Treasurer's letter dated 26th May, 1948, we have counted the voting papers of the Poll demanded at the Annual General Meeting on the 12th May, 1948, and attended Thursday, June 3rd and Friday, June 4th, 1948, for this purpose.

The number of voting papers sent out was 2,486.

A sealed box, stated to have been sealed at 5.30 p.m. on the 26th May, 1948, was handed to us. Also we were handed a bundle of envelopes stated to have arrived after the 26th May, 1948, and three telegrams dated 25th May, 1948, which have not been included in the figures below.

In the sealed box the following voting papers were counted.

To the question:—

"I agree to an Enquiry being held"	173
"I do not agree to an Enquiry being held" ..	256
Voting papers not recording a preference or spoilt	20

To the Chairman of the General Council.

In the bundle of letters stated to have been received after 26th May, 1948, the answers were:—

"I agree to an Enquiry being held"	16
"I do not agree to an Enquiry being held" ..	48
Voting papers spoilt	5

Telegrams which arrived 25th May, 1948, representing eleven members in favour of the Enquiry have not been included above.

The result of the Poll is, therefore, against the Enquiry being held, and even if all delayed answers and the telegrams were included it would not affect the result.

We think we should mention, however, that owing to an unfortunate delay in the printing of the necessary voting papers and consequent tardy despatch to members, there have been many protests against the short time allowed for the return of the voting papers.

(Signed) *Auditors to the Poetry Society.*